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HE GREY HOUSE

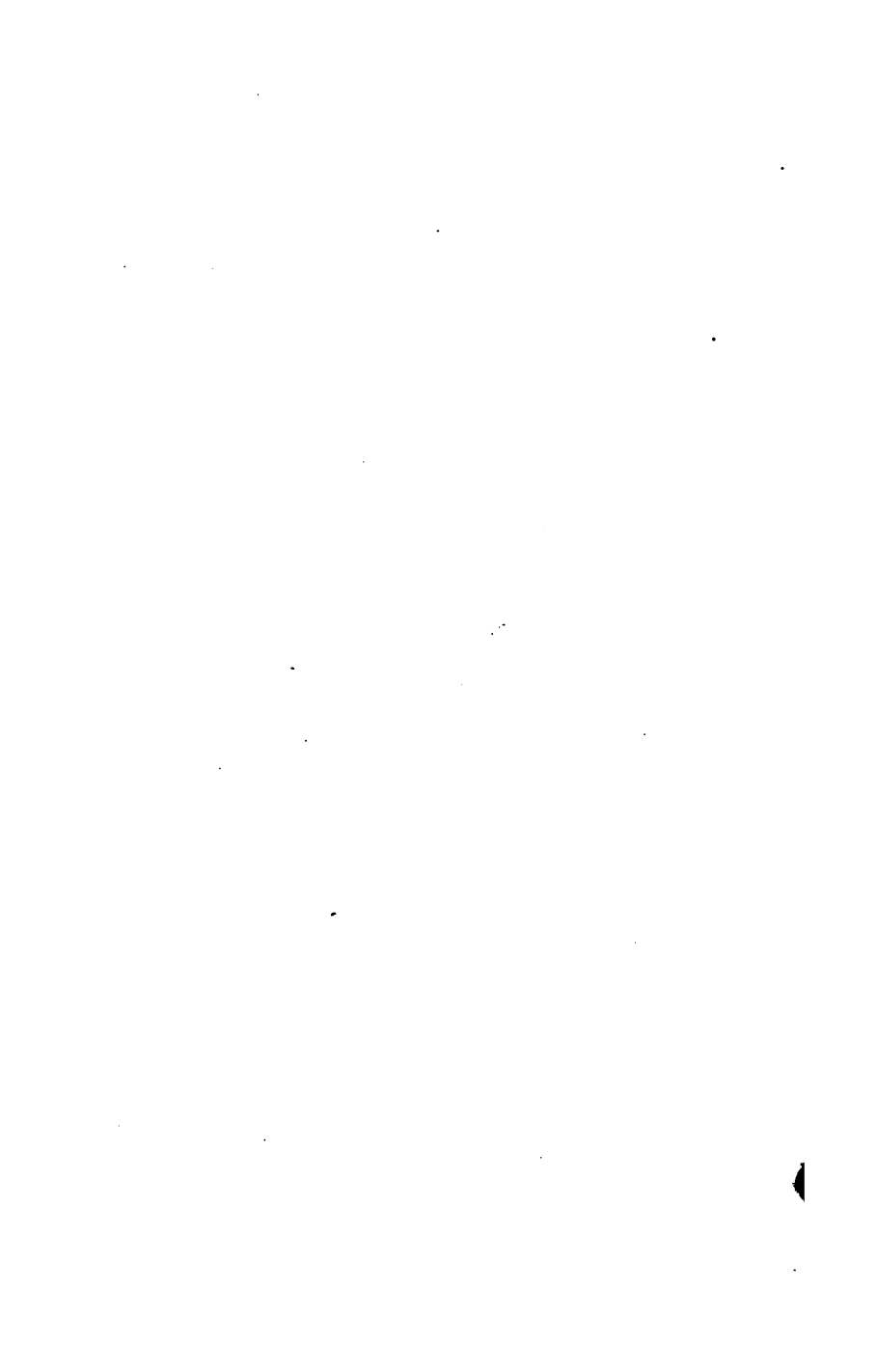
BUY THE TRUTH
AND SELL
IT NOT.

ON THE HILL.

By the HON. MRS GREENE.









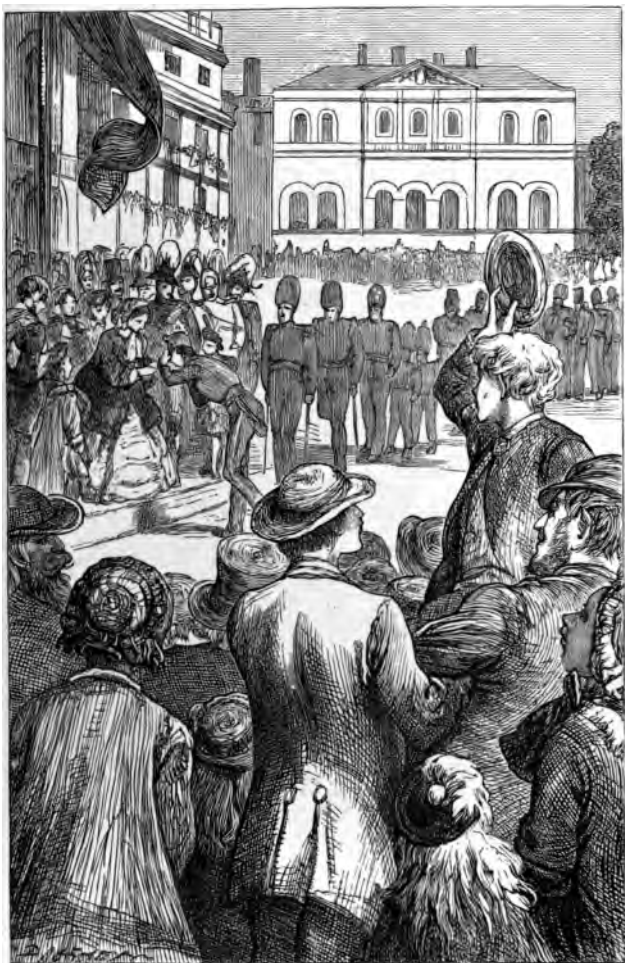
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THE GREY HOUSE ON THE HILL.

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THE VICTORIA CROSS.

"Alick! it is Alick, my brother!"—Page 206.



THE

GREY HOUSE ON THE HILL.

BY

THE HON^{BLE} MRS. GREENE.

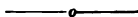


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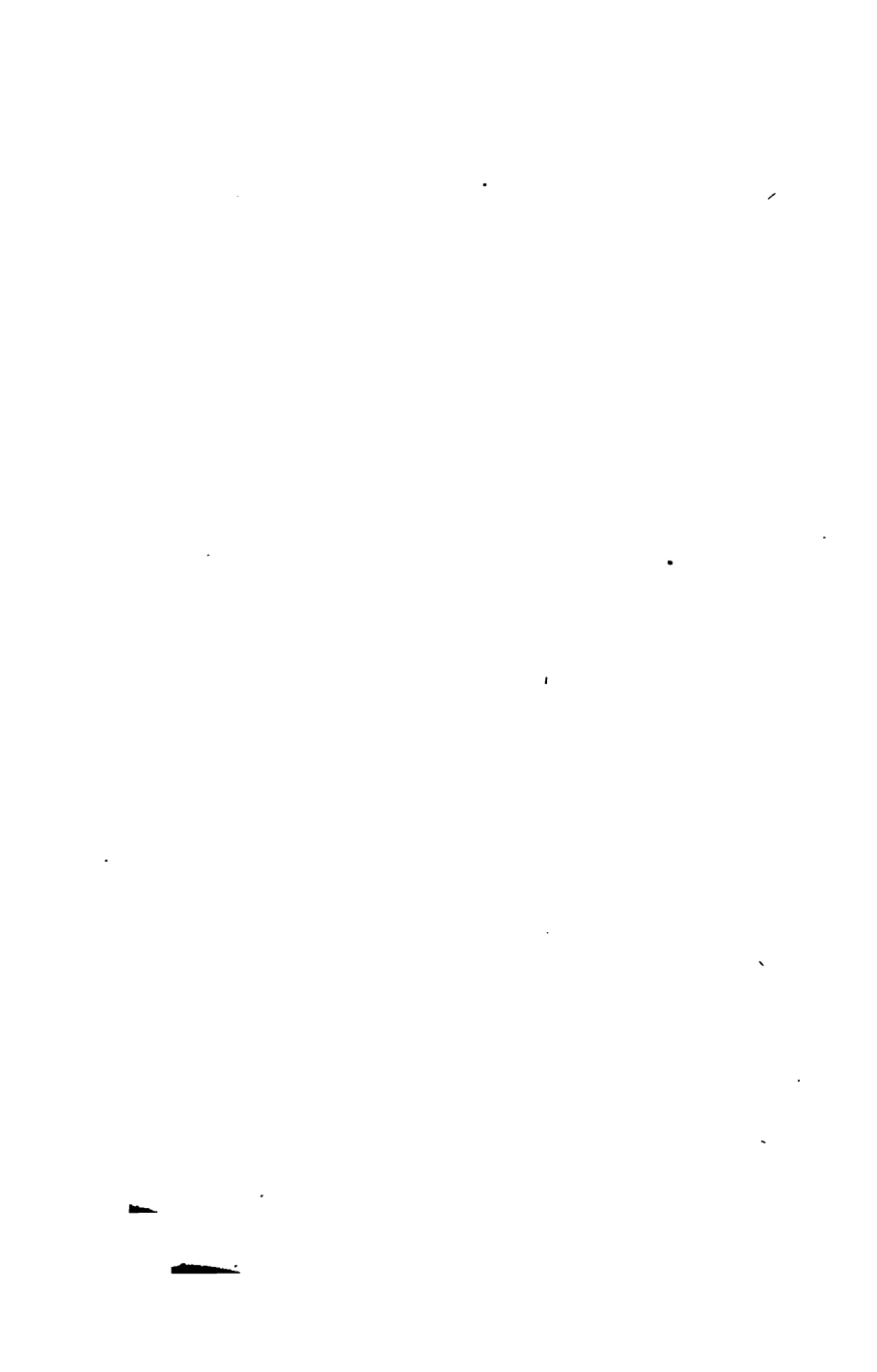
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THE

GREY HOUSE ON THE HILL.

CHAPTER I.

THE DREAM OF PAGE MAURICE.

 THE room was not dark, but very dreary-looking—long, and low, and narrow; so low that the dying flame of the candle made sooty circles on the white-washed ceiling above. An iron bed in the corner; an iron bell overhead, with a black tongue hanging, now silent, but ready to ring out a terrible peal and startle that weary little fellow who has fallen asleep on the wooden chair, with his head on the wooden table.

It is the night-bell of Dr. Sharpe's establishment, which hangs in the corner over Maurice Browne's

bed, and Maurice Browne is the little night-boy, who must jump up at the summons, and rouse his master with haste but caution; for Mrs. Sharpe is very ill, and a sudden hand on the door may set the poor heart fluttering for the rest of the sleepless night, be it long or short.

But Maurice Browne is not only night-boy, but day-boy too; pantry-boy, errand-boy, stable-boy, tiger-boy! The close row of plated buttons twinkling on his sleeve could tell us so; and the longer row down the front of his jacket might confirm it; but we cannot see them just now, for he is leaning forward on the table, tired out after his long day's work.

One arm is under his face—almost a baby face still, so soft and round—a face a mother would love to kiss, though Maurice's mother can never kiss it again; the other is stretched out beside the candlestick, and the hand, relaxed from heavy sleep, encircles a letter directed to himself, poor little night-boy, in his loneliness.

This letter came to London by the afternoon post; the Eppingdon post-mark was stamped clear and black on its cover; but it lay on the pantry-shelf unopened for two hours before Maurice Browne came in from his errands about town, and then he had only time to glance at the well-known hand, and thrust it into his pocket; for there were more

messages awaiting his return ; another basketful of medicine-bottles to be left at the patients' houses, and a five-pound note, entrusted to his charge by the butler, to be changed at the druggist's in High Street.

Poor Maurice had felt very downcast at the thought of all this work over again ; but the sight of the letter, so long expected, lying on the pantry-shelf gave him fresh strength, and he seized up his hat with the silver cords and was out into the street in a twinkling.

This letter was from his brother, his elder and only brother, and besides this, the one friend he possessed in the world. His mother was dead, and his father dead also, but buried in a far-off land, where in shame, remorse, and pain, he had ended his convict life.

No wonder Maurice yearned for these elder brother's letters, which were always so full of love, and comfort, and encouragement ; for sometimes he needed encouragement sorely, this poor night and day boy, who had been thrust out into the world to earn his bread when almost a baby.

Alick Browne knew this, and he tried at his office-desk to frame sentences which would comfort this little brother's heart, so gentle, and so trusting, and so dependent on him for support.

Maurice Browne put on his silver-laced hat, which always looked tall and out of place with the childish face beneath it, and with his basket on his arm, hurried down the street. Up to this house where the straw lay deep before it, up to that house where the knocker had been lifted off or closely muffled, and slowly away where the servant's silent nod or the closed shutters told that the doctor's draughts were no longer needed.

When his commissions were all executed, save the bundle of letters to be placed in the post-office and the bank-note to be changed, Maurice looked up at the town-clock, and seeing he was still in plenty of time, sat down on a trunk outside a trunkmaker's shop to read his brother's letter.

He had prepared his heart for something pleasant. Alick's words never failed to convey their meaning, and he had never written an unkind word yet. They came every Monday to cheer and rouse him before the week's hard work : only last Monday he had had none.

This one ought to be doubly pleasant and doubly long. It had two stamps instead of one ; and Maurice's plump baby hands trembled, and his blue eyes broke into smiles, at the taste of anticipated kindness.

It was a long, long letter, written down the

pages, and across the pages, in clear, well-formed characters; but the first leaf was enough—Maurice's hand sunk slowly on the trunk lid, the smile died out of his eyes, which brimmed up and looked vacantly out over the road and the passers-by. Over the omnibuses, with their horses straining up the paved and slippery highway; the hansoms gliding along swiftly; the drays lumbering past; the people hurrying onward.

Then his head sank forward on his breast, and he did not seem to know or feel anything else, until a man came out of the trunkmaker's shop, with a white apron tied in front of him, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"What are you doing here, my little man; you are wasting your time, ain't you?"

Maurice looked up at the face, out of the black dream into which he had so suddenly fallen. It brought him back to the street, to the roar of the carts, and to the remembrance of place and time.

"What ails you? are you tired, that you are sitting there?"

The voice was rough, but kind. The tears which had not fallen yet fell now from Maurice's eyes in great drops over the tiger-coat and the shining buttons. The trunkmaker was a stranger, but Maurice appealed to him in his terrible sorrow.

"He ought not to have gone and left me!—he ought not to have gone and left me! Ought he, sir? He knew that I—that I have no one else to—to—"

The trunkmaker knelt down on one knee beside him. Two or three boys and an old apple-woman stopped to stare at the sobbing child, but Maurice did not see them.

"Come into the shop," said the man, kindly. "You can sit awhile and rest yourself, if you like."

Maurice took the man's extended hand, and rose from the trunk. He had no more idea than a blind man where he was being led, or why he was going in among the portmanteaus, travelling-bags, and heaps of untanned leather, through a glass door, to a dingy room behind, with a dingy horse-hair sofa.

"There! sit down, my boy." Maurice sat down. "Now, what's the matter? What's happened to you? Who's left you, little fellow?"

"Alick, Alick! my brother Alick, sir! He is gone away to be a soldier. He is the only one I have. I have no one else in the whole world who cares for me."

"Is that letter from your brother?"

"Yes, sir;"—and Maurice put it into his hand in simple confidence, though he had only read the first half-page.

The trunkmaker leaned against a pile of boxes beside the door, and read the letter through. When he had finished, he folded it up slowly.

"There, my boy. You must not cry any more. You ought to be proud to have so good a brother. I never read a better or a kinder letter. Why, you'll be as happy as a prince some day, when he comes back from the wars with his red coat covered with medals."

Maurice's face lit up for a moment at this praise bestowed upon his brother; and he took the letter back from the trunkmaker's extended hand with a "Thank you, sir," and an effort at a grateful smile. But no words of comfort could touch his heart just now—no encouraging argument make him feel otherwise than a lonely, homeless, friendless boy.

The trunkmaker stood by his side good-naturedly for nearly a quarter of an hour, reasoning with him, laughing at him, and condoling with him; till at length, a lady customer coming into the shop, he was obliged to go out to speak to her—which he did, closing the glass doors after him.

Maurice took the basket from his left arm, and laid it down on the floor behind the sofa; then unfolded his brother's letter again, and tried to read it. But it was in vain; his hand trembled so, and the tears quivered fresh and fresh before his eyes.

He grew each moment more dark and desolate-feeling ; till at length he felt he could bear it no longer. He folded the letter, replaced it in his pocket, and went out through the glass doors into the shop.

"Thank you, sir," he said, gratefully, as he hurried through.

"Not at all, not at all. I shall be glad to see you any time you're passing by," replied the trunk-maker, cordially.

And, forgetful of basket, letters, and money, Maurice crossed the street, and turned wearily towards home, trying with an aching mind to puzzle out the question, whether he could ever live or wait till Alick came home from the wars, his red coat covered with medals.

When Maurice reached home he found his master had been called out suddenly to an urgent case of illness. He might not be home till night, or possibly till the early morning. But Maurice had plenty to do, nevertheless. The heavy out-of-door work had thrown the in-door work behind. The butler, taking advantage of his master's absence, had gone out, leaving his share of work to be done by "the little chap ;" and it was not till ten o'clock at night poor Maurice sat down on the chair by the wooden table to finish Alick's letter.

There could not, as the trunkmaker had said,

have been a kinder or a better letter—every sentence full of love, pity, and remorse. Alick's master—an attorney—had suddenly made off with a large sum of money. The young clerk's wages—which he had left untouched, unasked for—were not forthcoming, and in a moment of bitter disappointment he had enlisted.

“My dear old Maurice, it was for you I was gathering up this money. I wanted to have got you into the office with myself; I wanted to have had you close to me. I used to long to have your chair drawn up beside my own; for there is no one in the world I love like you, my dear, brave old boy, who are fighting your way in the world so nobly. But you'll go on fighting it bravely, Maurice. God will never desert you, as I have done.”

It was here the first great sob burst from poor Maurice, and that the plated buttons heaved up and down against the table before him. He went on painfully to make out the rest. The regiment was to start in two days to join the army before Sebastopol. There would be danger, no doubt; but God was merciful. Maurice must only have faith: let his motto, his watchword be, “Trust in God, and do the right.” Then some streaks, and blots, and blisters over the paper, before Maurice, guiding the

lines with his soft young fingers, had made it all out.

The wick of the candle had grown long, with a black fungus on its top, when at length the sobbing ceased. Maurice had fallen asleep : heavily asleep, as we found him at the beginning of the chapter, with the flame leaping up and down fitfully, and the night-bell hanging silent over the empty bed. Asleep, dreaming of soldiers, and battles, and shining medals. Asleep, when the sound of wheels came rumbling up the silent street. Asleep—deeper sleep—dreaming now of the desk in the office where he sits with Alick by his side. Asleep, when the night-bell rings a startling peal over the tenantless bed, and the candle gives its last leap, and dies in the socket. Asleep, still asleep ; for his lips are breaking into smiles, and where a tear lay a moment ago, a dimple is gathering now.

Another peal of the bell ! Why does he not awake ? The tired master is at the door ; he will grow furious presently. No ; Maurice only turns his head on his arm, with the shivering echo of a sob.

Another peal ! Maurice starts up. It was only a dream after all, poor Maurice ! He feels his way by the wall to the door, up the dark staircase, along the hall, and lets in the angry master.

"Is this the way you attend to your business, you lazy cub? No wonder I lose my patients, if people are kept standing for an hour in the cold waiting for you to awake! Get me a candle."

Maurice crept back again by the wall to the pantry; took a candle from the shelf; lit it at the kitchen fire; came up again, and placed it in the doctor's hand.

"Why—how have you all your clothes on? Was it to dress yourself that you kept me waiting outside all this time, eh?"

"No, sir; I had not got into bed yet."

"Then what were you doing? Some mischief, I'll be bound—staying up till two in the morning. This sort of work will never do. You must look out for some other place. I can't have my patients leaving me because you choose to be lazy, or worse."

And the doctor tramped up the staircase; heavily and wearily too, for he had had a hard day's work as well as Maurice.





CHAPTER II.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.



R. SHARPE'S threats were seldom idle ones; he was a determined, positive man, who, when he made up his mind on a subject, seldom unmade it again; and he had resolved last night, as he stood on the steps stamping with cold and impatience, that Maurice Browne, the little page, should leave his service.

He was too young for a doctor's servant, too short for a silver-laced hat, too sleepy for a night-bell, not sharp enough to know the difference between a good patient and a bad one. If a lady, rustling in silks, slipped a shilling into his hand to be shown first into the doctor's study, he always gave it with her card into his master's hand. If he was scolded, he turned pale; if he was praised, he blushed; if you spoke kindly to him, why, his eyes filled with tears. Altogether, he was more of the

goose order than the tiger; and the resolve was taken that he should go.

"Spencer, send Maurice here."

"Yes, sir;" and the butler hurried down, glad that the cloud on his master's brow should burst on another head than his.

"Maurice, you're to go up to the master, and be quick, for the carriage is at the door."

Maurice laid down the silver ladle and chamois, and went up quickly, as he was told.

"Maurice."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you been thinking over what I said to you last night?"

Maurice hesitated, looked down at the carpet, then wonderingly up into his master's face. "No, sir."

"How do you mean, boy? What do you mean by 'No, sir?'"

"I don't remember, sir."

"Don't remember! It's evident, then, that it did not make much impression on your mind, and that you don't much care whether you go or stay. You won't find it so easy to get another place like this, I can tell you."

That stupid paleness which irritated the doctor so much began to creep over Maurice's face now, and the still more stupid tears into his eyes.

"Now, don't begin to whine, my boy, and pull a long face; it won't move me from my purpose in the least. If I had not quite made up my mind as to what I was going to do, I should not have sent for you; do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, can't you find anything to say but 'Yes, sir,' or 'No, sir'?" Don't you see the carriage is at the door, and that I can't waste my time? though, as far as that goes, you don't seem to think it of much consequence, if I am to judge by the hour you kept me waiting in the cold last night."

It was dawning upon Maurice now—the dream of the medals and clasps, the peal of the night-bell, and the master's threat as he went up the creaking staircase.

"Do you mean I am to go away, sir?"

"Certainly I do."

"When, sir?"

"Oh, whenever you like. The sooner for me the better. I find I must get an older boy in your place; you're quite too small, and too young, and too—too—lazy; but you're not a bad boy, Maurice, and I'll try what I can do towards procuring you another place."

"But where shall I go to now, sir?"

"Oh, well, let me see; you had better go to

your home, I think. I'll send for you if I hear of anything likely to suit you."

"I have got no home, sir."

Maurice's eyes were looking out over the doctor's blinds into the streets in the same vacant manner they had done yesterday in front of the trunk-maker's shop.

"No home! why, that's absurd. A small boy like you to have no home! You had better make your way, then, to some of your own people, wherever they live, and stay with them for a time till you are stronger and more fit for service. You have been sent out too young into the world—much too young, my boy."

The doctor spoke the last words with more feeling, and turned to open his desk; for though he was not a particularly soft-hearted man, he was a doctor; and he did not like to see the young face before him growing whiter and whiter under his words, and the small hand creeping out to the side-board for support.

"There is your quarter's wages, Maurice, and—and—let me see—yes—you may keep your livery, for I shan't get another boy as small or young as you again; and I daresay you may find it useful."

Dr. Sharpe laid a sovereign on the table before Maurice, and took up his hat and gloves. "There,

take your money and go down. You can ask Mrs. Perry's advice about what you had best do ; she is a good-natured old soul, and I am sure will be glad to help. I can't delay now to look after you myself," and the doctor moved towards the door, but stopped on hearing a ring at the house-bell.

"A lady wants to know whether you can see her for a few minutes before you go out."

"Certainly ; show her in, Spencer."

And Maurice found himself sitting on a chair in the pantry without almost knowing how he got down there.

"Bless the boy, what's come over him now?" asked Mrs. Perry, some quarter of an hour afterwards, when she found him still seated, staring down at the red tiles on the pantry floor.

He looked up when she spoke, but in such a stupid, dazed way that the good woman grew frightened.

"Why, what's up now, boy ; you're not sick, are you ?"

"Mrs. Perry."

"Well, ain't I here beside you ? What ails you ? Speak out, can't you, little fellow."

But Maurice did not speak out. He seemed as if he were reading slowly the words off the red tiles at his feet.

"Mrs. Perry—master says—I am—to go away."

"To go away! Hey-day. What's that for? What have you been doing now?"

But again Maurice did not answer her questions. His words came slower and slower.

"I—have—no—place—to—go—to," then a dry sob, a long sigh, and a fruitless effort to say something more.

"No place to go to! Come, come; you can't be so badly off as all that. Where's that handsome, long-legged brother of yours, who came here some time ago? You can go for the present to him, can't you. He'll give you house-room and welcome till you find another place, if I am not mistaken."

Another dry, struggling sob, and appealing glance at the kind-hearted housekeeper, and Maurice's grief burst forth.

She made out the whole story in broken patches. This very brother of whom she spoke had left him—had gone away to be a soldier; and now Maurice was turned out on the wide world, without one friend to care for him. But the sorest point with the little fellow seemed to be, that his brother should have left him without seeing him once more, or bidding him good-bye.

He placed Alick's letter in Mrs. Perry's hand, who read it through to the end very slowly; for

she had left her spectacles on the kitchen-table; and besides, wet eyes are infectious. When, however, she had reached the end, her kind face brightened up, and she said, cheerily,—

“Why, then, if I’m not mistaken, you’ll be able to see him after all, my poor boy. Does not he say here he won’t be leaving for two days? Ay, does he; so just look sharp, and put on your hat, and be off by the very next train to Eppingdon. Half-an-hour’s talk with him would be worth all the old women’s advice in the world, if I preached from now till Christmas.”

Poor Maurice started from the trance he had moved in ever since the first reading of his brother’s letter.

“But can master let me go to-day, do you think, Mrs. Perry?”

“Just you wait there a bit and I’ll ask him; and you had better be gathering up your few little things.”

They were, indeed, a few little things—a small hand parcel could hold them all; and Maurice listened with sickening impatience for the return of the good woman’s foot.

She came back bonneted and cloaked, and took him by the hand. There, now, it’s all right; only you’ll have to make haste if you want to catch the

next train. Spencer says we have only ten minutes to get to the station, and I'll see you a bit of the way myself."

It was rather a breathless race for a fattish old woman and a very small boy; but the omnibus picked them up at the bridge and dropped them at the terminus with four minutes to spare.

"There, good-bye, my boy; do whatever your brother tells you; and why, if it chances he's gone, you must only remember what he said himself in his letter—'Trust in God, and don't be afraid of anything;' and God bless you, too, for a poor, little, lonely fellow." This last sentence she murmured to herself while a good, honest tear came plumping down on her black bonnet-strings.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Perry;" and Maurice stretched up his arms and kissed her with a lingering earnestness, then stepped into the carriage with the wild fear fluttering at his heart of being launched upon a strange world without even this one friend to comfort him; but with the wilder hope urging him on that he might yet see Alick again.





CHAPTER III.

OUR OLD TOM.



OUTSIDE the door of Tandy's the confectioner's, situated at the foot of Mercer's Hill, in the old town of Eppingdon, stood a comfortable phaeton, from which a long-legged boy had just alighted, and a girl was preparing to follow.

"Where are you going to now, Tom?"

"Just across the street to Drewitt's to see why he has not sent home my boots; I'll be back in less than no time."

"Well, don't be long;" and the speaker, a little girl in a short, flounced silk dress and straw hat, stepping down from the carriage, went into the pastrycook's, while her brother Tom, her senior by several years, crossed the street and entered the boot-maker's shop opposite.

"Well, Drewitt, you are a nice kind of a fellow, ain't you? Where are the boots you

promised to have finished for me on Wednesday evening?"

"Just sending them off this very moment, Master Holdsworth; the boy is putting the string round them in the inner room."

"Very well, I'll wait here till they are ready."

"No, no, don't trouble yourself; I'll send them home for you, Master Holdsworth; I'll not disappoint you this time, I promise you."

"It's no trouble at all, Drewitt, thank you; the carriage is just opposite, so I can take them easily."

"Very good, sir; take a seat, won't you?"

"Thank you;" and Tom Holdsworth threw himself lazily down on the chair, for the day was hot, and he was tired of doing nothing, save going in and out from one shop to another.

"How's the doctor, sir?"

"Well, thank you, Drewitt."

"And Miss Lily?"

"Stunning, thank you; but how's your own son, Drewitt."

"Poorly, sir; but poorly, thank you."

"How's that? Father was in great spirits about him a little while ago."

"Well, indeed, Master Holdsworth, it's nothing but fretting has thrown him back. You see, sir,

the young lodger above stairs he was so fond of has gone and enlisted."

"What! that nice dark-haired boy I have so often seen about the place here?"

"Just so, sir; gone off and enlisted. His master, the old attorney in Crewe Street, came to a smash suddenly a couple of days ago, and left the poor boy without a penny in the world."

"What a shame, I say! and such a good young fellow as he seemed."

"He was the best boy," continued the shoemaker, shaking his head over the boot he was piercing; "the best boy, and the best scholar in the world; he used to sit by the hour when he came home from his work reading to my poor lad above stairs; and it would break your heart to see the way he was in about leaving his little brother up in London."

"Oh! I say, Drewitt," interrupted Tom suddenly, "what's that you've got hanging up there, eh?" and he pointed to a long strip of silver paper gaily painted in coloured letters; "something new to be seen in the town, I suppose?"

"Just so, sir; I hear it's all about the flower-show which is to be held in the gardens. I did not read it myself, for I can't say as how I feel much interest in those kind o' things."

"Don't *I*, though?" cried Tom, jumping up, and

reading the paper earnestly, till a step in the passage outside and a clink at the bell over the door made them both look round.

The door opened slowly, very slowly, and a tiger-boy in shining buttons and silver-laced hat looked timidly in.

Tom was going to laugh—there was something so ludicrously out of place in the tall hat and the very young face beneath it; but instead of laughing, he felt quite a different, queer sort of a feeling coming over him, as the little fellow looked appealingly across the shop.

“Well, my little man, what’s your message?” asked the shoemaker kindly, as he handed Tom the boots, which had just been brought to him from the inner room.

The boy did not answer the question; he gazed wistfully at the spiral staircase in the centre of the shop, and made a step forward.

“Well, what’s the row? can’t you speak, little fellow?” asked Tom, curiously.

“I want Alick.”

“Who is Alick?”

“Is he gone, sir?” and the boy made another step towards the spiral staircase.

“How can I tell you, my little chap, if I don’t know who Alick is?”

"He's my brother."

"Is it Alick Browne you want?" asked the shoemaker, kindly. "Why, you're not little Maurice Browne, are you, who was here a couple of years ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, well, that's a pity now, a real pity. You have come all the way from London to see him, have you?"

"Yes, sir." The poor little fellow's lips were quivering now as he looked up at his questioner.

"Dear, dear, it's not an hour since the regiment marched down the street to the railway. And so you are the little brother he was so fond of; why, I'd never know you, you're so changed."

"Marched down the street," stammered Maurice, almost wildly. "Do you think, sir, if I ran, I could overtake them?"

"Let's take a cab and try, at all events," cried Tom, impetuously.

"Oh, bless your heart, Master Holdsworth, the train, she's gone this half hour past. Did not I follow them down myself, and see the poor lad off, and give him my blessing, as he had none of his own could do it for him?"

Poor Maurice made another blind step forwards, falling over a boot-last, but rising again.

"May I go up-stairs, sir?"

"Yes, to be sure; but, dear heart, what's the use, when I tell you he's gone, and you can't find him there?"

But Maurice still walked on, and laid his hand on the circular banisters to steady himself.

"The door to the right hand side as you go up."

"Yes, sir; I know." And though the steep steps seemed to lurch under his feet, and the boarding above to rise and fall, Maurice made his way to Alick's forsaken room, and knew with a glance and a sick shudder his brother was really gone, and that he was henceforth to be all alone in the world.

The afternoon sun was blazing in through the open window, and dancing on the boards at his feet; but Maurice did not see it. His little heart was as dark as a well just now, and clouds of black mist were floating before his eyes. He saw only the wooden bedstead in the corner, with Alick's favourite tabby asleep on the coverless pillow. He stretched out his hand towards the footboard; a mocking voice from the window cried, "Welcome home, Maurice!" It was the old parrot picking some sand out of the sole of her gray foot; but the little page thought it was Alick's voice calling him, and he fell on the ground, with his plated buttons.

twinkling in the sun, and his white face turned up towards the ceiling.

"What's that?" cried Tom in the room beneath, as the gas-lustres trembled. "The little chap upstairs has got a spill, I'm afraid."

The shoemaker dropped his awl, and hurried up the staircase, tripping over his long black apron in his eagerness, while Tom followed at his heels.

"There he is surely, lying on his back on the floor. I wonder what's come over him!"

"Poor little fellow, I saw him get awfully white when he heard his brother was gone. Is it a faint, Drewitt—or what is it?" and Tom knelt down and lifted up Maurice's curly head, with the wide-open guileless eyes still looking fixedly up at the ceiling. "I say, Drewitt, run down the street, will you, and call father; he's in at the drug-hall. Say I sent you, and that I want him here at once." Meantime, Tom lifted Maurice up and laid him on the bed in the corner; then drew aside the muslin blind to let the wind come in more freely, and rubbed the little boy's dimpled hands between his own rough ones.

But there was no sign of returning consciousness, and Tom's good-natured heart began to fail him. He could hit a boy his own size, or even a trifle larger, a good honest blow, and perhaps knock him

down unceremoniously, and suffer little in conscience afterwards ; but to see anything smaller or weaker than himself suffering, was a thing which unmanned him at once, and made him feel as soft-hearted as a girl.

So he stared at the page's buttons, the well-worn boots, and the silver-laced hat—which had rolled under the table—at the table itself, at the empty fire-grate—at everything but the still, white face on the pillow.

At length he heard his father's step and his father's cough in the room below—both so peculiarly his own as to be unmistakable ; and soon his father's bald head, kind face, and portly form appeared at the head of the spiral staircase.

“To the right, if you please, doctor.”

“Ah ! yes, I see ! poor little fellow !” and Tom made way for his father to approach the bed.

“There is not much the matter is there, father ?” he asked at length in hesitation.

“There must always be a good deal the matter, Tom, to make a boy faint off as this poor little fellow has done. And a fine healthy child, too, to all appearance.”

It had taken a good deal, as we know, to make poor Maurice faint—anxiety, fatigue, hunger, and despair—and he came back to his senses slowly

enough. He did not, however, appear frightened at the strange faces around him. He seemed to take in at once they all meant kindly to him, and to be grateful for it.

Dr. Holdsworth extracted, without much difficulty, his short history—the story of Alick's letter, of his dismissal from Dr. Sharpe's, of his bitter disappointment, and of the lonely life before him.

"Can we do nothing for him, father?" asked Tom as the doctor moved towards the window, and looked with a puzzled air into the street.

"I have been just turning it over in my mind. Let me hear what you propose, Tom."

"Why, I was thinking if we were to take him home with us, and give him that spare room in Nannie's lodge. We could keep an eye on him, and he could help in the garden, or about the place, could not he? He is such an awfully jolly little fellow, I can't bear the thoughts of his having no one to look after him; eh, father?"

Tom's father shook his head so doubtfully, and looked so grave, Tom feared for a time that he disapproved of his plan; but at length, turning round pleasantly, he said,—

"Well, Tom, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll hand him over into your charge until I write to London and hear from Dr. Sharpe what he thinks of the

boy, and if that is all satisfactory, why, then, we must try and see what we can do for him."

So Maurice was carried across the street by the bootmaker, and put into the back seat of the phaeton, while Tom went into the pastrycook's and brought him out a smoking bun and a package of peppermint lozenges.

Lily Holdsworth came out of the shop and stared at him for some time, till her brother, with small ceremony, desired her to "get into the carriage, and not stand gaping at nothing, like a duck in a thunder-storm."

Lily got up into the front seat of the carriage, and settled her little flounces over her knees. Tom climbed up behind, and took his seat beside Maurice, and they only awaited now the arrival of their father, who had gone back to finish his purchases at the drug-hall.

"I say, Lily, old girl, spent all your tin, I suppose, in there, eh?" and Tom chucked one of the chestnut curls which hung in profusion over Lily's summer mantle.

"No; of course I didn't."

"I should like to know, then, how much there can be left, after paying for six currant-buns, four queen's cakes, two dozen gingerbreads, at least, and a bag of sucks?"

"For shame, Tom."

"I heard you making up the bill myself in the shop."

"I had only three buns and two queen's cakes, so you heard wrong, my dear boy."

"Well, don't get angry, but listen till I tell something which I really did hear—a splendid piece of news for me! The flower-show is to be on this day fortnight, and they are going to double the prizes for fruit."

Lily turned her head round quickly at this piece of intelligence, so that Maurice could see her face quite plainly, and an eager, bright little face it was, with a cocked nose, light gray eyes, and somewhat pointed chin.

"And how much do you think you will make at the show, Tom?"

"Three sovereigns, if I get 'first prize,' which I expect to do, for my currants."

Here the doctor stepped into the carriage, lifted the reins from the silver bar in front, and drove on.

Out of the town, through the suburbs, and into the green lanes beyond, where the smell of the newly-mown hay, and the wild-roses and woodbine in the hedges, brought the colour back to Maurice's cheeks.

Tom took great care of him all the way home.

He put his arm round him even before they got out of the town, and pointed him out the different objects which he thought would interest or amuse him.

The identical old cow with the crumplety horn that tossed the dog quite over the lawn; the Eppingdon school-house; the very old man by the road-side in whose beard the swallows made a nest long ago; the church where he was to go to prayers next Sunday, and, if he liked, to Sunday school.

"Yes; and I teach a class there," said Lily, turning quickly.

"And I hope, if you go there, she'll teach you to be as good a little girl as she is, eh, old boy? What's your name? I forget."

"Maurice, sir."

"And now that's the workhouse on the hill close by, and here's our gate to the left; and you're to sleep in that little lodge all covered with roses, and be as jolly as a king; and now you won't fret any more, eh, old man?"

"No, sir;" and Maurice, looking up gratefully, smiled till his whole face dimpled over, then, while the gates were opening, he slipped his hand into Tom's.

"You'll love me, won't you, Master Tom?"

"Of course I will, like bricks."



CHAPTER IV.

THE LETTER FROM LONDON.

TOM, I am afraid this sounds very bad.”
“What, father?”
“This letter from Dr. Sharpe which I have just received.”
“Why, what does he say? What can he say against the boy?”

“There, you can see it for yourself,” and Dr. Holdsworth handed the letter across the corner of the breakfast-table to his son. “You may as well read it out, Tom, for Lily has not heard it either.”

Tom’s face grew quite red and angry, and his voice excited, as he read the following words:—

“DEAR DR. HOLDSWORTH,—In accordance with your wishes, I sit down to give you any information I possess about Maurice Browne, who lived in my service as page for the last two years.

“I am sorry you have called upon me to give him a character, as I cannot say much in his favour.

He was certainly lazy and stupid, and, I have every reason now to fear, dishonest.

“ ‘On the day before he left my service, he was entrusted with a five-pound note by the butler to change at a druggist’s in the town. This money he never brought home, and no doubt kept it for himself.

“ ‘He comes of a bad family. His father was transported for robbery some six years ago, and his elder brother, from all I can learn, is a wild, unsettled sort of character. I advise you strongly to have nothing to say to the child, as, with the most innocent face in the world, I now believe him capable of any dishonesty.

“ ‘His conduct towards me has been deceitful and ungrateful in the extreme. He duped me up to the last moment he remained in the house, insomuch that I paid him his wages, gave him almost a new suit of clothes, and permitted him to leave my service at an hour’s notice, to my own great inconvenience. I regret, as I said before, that you should have called upon me for a character equally distasteful to give as to receive.—Believe me, dear sir, yours very truly,

“ ‘SAMUEL SHARPE.’

“ ‘Humbug,” cried Tom, throwing the letter down

on the table—"humbug; I don't believe a word of it."

"Tom, Tom, my dear, that's rather strong language."

"Well, but now really, father, do you believe yourself that Maurice is the sort of boy this fellow tries to make him out?"

"Fellow! my dear Tom, worse and worse; your zeal for your charge makes you somewhat inconsiderate in your language,—'this fellow' only wrote the letter which has vexed you so much at my request," and Dr. Holdsworth smiled at his son's impetuous anger.

"How can you account for his not changing the note Dr. Sharpe's butler gave him?" asked Lily, sententiously, conveying a slice of bread thickly covered with marmalade to her mouth.

"How can I account for your not getting sick with all you eat?" retorted Tom, bursting all bonds of civility. "Give a dog a bad name and hang him. I'll not believe one word in this letter until I speak to Maurice himself," and Tom, seizing up the letter from the table, jumped out through the open window of the breakfast-room into the lawn.

Maurice had had his breakfast an hour ago, and was sitting in the sun with his back to a haycock. It would have done you good to see how happy he

looked this morning, and how grateful the little heart within was feeling; he was watching now for Tom's foot or Tom's voice to summon him to the garden, where he was to begin work under his young master's directions.

Maurice had never been living in the country before, he had been whirled through it twice or thrice in a railway carriage, and once Alick had taken him for a lunch in a hazel wood; but he had never slept four whole nights in a room before, where the roses were coming in at the window, or heard the larks singing freely up in the high air, or smelt the delicious smell of newly-mown hay.

A sort of calm had come on the poor little troubled bosom—a faith that though Alick was away God was quite close; he never doubted for a moment that it was He who had sent that tall kind Tom to be his friend and protector, and who had put him now down among the fields and flowers to wait patiently for his brother's return.

But there was some one coming down the lawn. Maurice looked up brightly, for, yes! here was long-legged Tom straggling across the grass in search of him with a letter in his hand.

“Maurice!”

“Yes, sir,” Maurice's heart throbbed up for a moment, thinking foolishly it might be a letter from

Alick ; but Tom kept it tight in his closed hand and threw himself down on the grass beside the boy.

"Maurice, I have come to ask you a question ; you're a good boy, ain't you, and you'll speak the truth ?"

"Yes, sir," replied Maurice simply.

"Very well ; now listen to me, and don't get frightened while I ask you one or two questions ; and mind I'm your friend, I promised you that ; and besides I like you awfully,—and speak out and don't be afraid, won't you Maurice ?"

"I will indeed, sir," replied the boy, growing more puzzled every moment.

"Do you remember the day before you left Dr. Sharpe's—last Monday, I think ? Do you remember what messages you were given on that day, or what shops you went to ?"

Maurice thought for a moment. Monday—yes, that was the day he got Alick's letter : it was very difficult to remember what happened on that day, but he would try to do so faithfully.

"I was running of messages all day, going with bottles of medicines to houses and shops, and in the evening I was cleaning the knives and spoons, and polishing the boots."

"Did the butler send you out for anything ?"

"Yes; with a bundle of letters and a five-pound note to be changed."

"What did you do with that five-pound note, Maurice?"

"I put it in my basket with the letters and the bottles."

"Well, and what did you do with your basket?"

"I took it,"—here Maurice came to a sudden stop, his eyes dilated as if looking into the far distance, and the colour came up in waves over his cheek.

Tom's colour went down in exact proportion, but he was not going to give up yet. "You what, Maurice? Speak up, don't be afraid, but tell the truth."

"I'm trying to remember." Trying to remember, that sounded bad; Tom looked into Maurice's face.

"I laid it down somewhere, I know I did," said the boy, laying his hand dreamily on the grass at his right hand side; "I laid it down that I might read Alick's letter, and then I left the shop."

"Then what happened?"

Maurice seemed to be questioning a crow which was seated on the hedge opposite, but Tom made no movement.

"Yes; then I went out and crossed over under the Post Office, but I didn't put any letters in, did I? no, I am sure I didn't; then, I must have lost

the letters too. O Master Tom, what must I do?"

Tom had watched Maurice's face intently all the while, as he strove to recall the money and the letters and the basket; and no jury of twelve men could come to a sounder decision than he did.

"I see it all, you poor little fellow: you stopped to read Alick's letter, and you laid your basket on the ground, or in a shop, and forgot to take it up; was not that it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, see here,—I'd give you a five-pound note, if I had it, this moment, to send back to him, just to show you're an honest boy, but I have not got it; so you must earn some money as fast as you can, and I'll help you; and when we've gathered it all up, we'll pay it back, and he'll see that you're made of the proper stuff after all. There, now, you stay here till I go up to the house and tell them, and when I want you in the garden, I'll call you."

Dr. Holdsworth not having heard Tom's cross-examination at the foot of the haycocks, or not having seen Maurice's truthful face, was inclined to take a more doubtful view of the case than his impetuous son: he was, however, a wise and kind man, and anxious himself to give the boy a fair trial.

"But, Tom, take my advice," he said kindly, "and don't in your own confidence place the little fellow in the way of fresh temptation : the garden is full of ripe fruit just at present ; I would rather he did not work there—he may stay with the shepherd in the large meadow, or watch the cattle in the lawn, but I would rather, for the present, he did not come into the house or garden."

Tom thought this rather a severe regulation, and looked somewhat glum ; he was disappointed, too, that he could not show Maurice his beautiful plants, and the currant-bush, weighed down with fruit, for which he hoped to get the prize : but he was always accustomed to obey, and he comforted himself by gathering his charge a handful of flowers, choosing him a comfortable nook from which to watch the cattle, and by burning Dr. Sharpe's letter in the fire.





CHAPTER V.

THE PRIZE CURRANT-BUSH.



“ALL right ; here I’ve found him : B. Rogers, Trunkmaker, 16 Beadle Street,” and Tom, taking up an envelope, directed it accordingly. “And if that does not bring back the money, I’ve thought of another capital dodge, Lily.”

“What is it, Tom ?”

“Why, I’ll give the three guineas I get for the currant prize, and then I’ll sell the fruit afterwards to Tandy, and that will go a long way towards making up five pounds.”

“But you have not got the prize yet, Tom ; you are counting your chickens before they are hatched.”

“I’m aware of that, wiseacre ; but I’m pretty sure of it for all that,” and Tom shut up the Directory with a bang, and shoved it up on the study shelf. “I say, Lily, why do you always take a delight in rubbing a fellow up the wrong way ?”

"I don't ; it is you who are always doing it," and Lily's face flushed up over her tatting.

"Why, what have I done now ?"

"It's not now, it's every day, especially since Maurice came ; you don't talk to me, or help me with my lessons, or anything. You have not asked me to go into the garden for nearly a week."

"Haven't I ?" replied Tom ; "well, that's too bad, really ; I'll begin and talk to you now, then, I'll write your French exercise for you, take a walk round the garden afterwards, and then we are to be the best of friends, eh ? Lily, old girl."

Lily did not answer ; she darted her shuttle in and out more vigorously than ever, and Tom resumed.

"Now for a talk. Let me see : This is a fine day, Lily : showery, but bright at intervals, a few clouds overhead, and a few puddles under foot."

No answer from Lily.

"Oh, very good ; the talking is to be all on one side, I see, like the handle of a can ; that will be rather fatiguing work for me, but never say die ; we'll go back to the weather, there's nothing like weather, you know, Lily, so here goes—

The breeze comes gently up the wynd,
The horses' tails hang down behind,
The bumble bee is on the wing,
Look out, my love, or it will sting.

Come, now, that's very good talk, ain't it ?"

No answer from Lily.

Tom looked up to the ceiling for inspiration, and continued solemnly—

“There’s nothing in the world can please her,

So now I think I’ll try and tease her.

There’s not a flower in all the world with Lily can compare,

With her eyes so green, her nose so short, and her lovely crimson hair.

How fast she darts her shuttle in, how fast she plucks it out;

She never looks so nice, or sweet, as when she’s in a pout.

Now for the French exercise, Lily? *Je ne sais quoi*—if I’m not a good boy.”

“I’ve written my French exercise, Tom.”

“You don’t say so: what else have you got to do then?”

“Nothing but my practising.”

“All right, I’ll practise for you.” Tom seated himself on the music stool, spun round five or six times rapidly, and came down with a frightful chord on the piano.

“Don’t, Tom!”

“Why not? What’s wrong? The first bar in Beethoven’s—what do you call it? That thing that is always running after itself. Oh, what a muff I am—fugle, to be sure!”

“I’ve got a headache, Tom.”

“Oh, I’m awfully sorry! I’ll finish your practising afterwards.” Tom spun round six times more and stood up.

"I say, look out. Don't now, that makes a fellow giddy," and he fell up against Lily, knocking the tatting-shuttle out of her hand.

"Tom, how rude you are!"

"Where's your bonnet and cloak, Lily? We've finished the talking and lessons, and now we're going to have a walk round the garden, and a few gooseberries, and after that we're to be prime friends; was not that the bargain, eh?"

Lily could not resist this last appeal.

"They are up in my room, Tom. The bonnet is in my wardrobe, and the cloak is hanging up on the hook behind the door."

Tom came down quickly with the white linen bonnet on his own rough head, and his arms protruding through the sleeves of Lily's cloak.

"Tom, you are dreadfully foolish to-day!" And so he was terribly foolish; but the thought of making up Maurice's lost five-pound note was at the root of it all.

Lily put on her things, and they walked up the "Lady's Walk" to the garden, under a tunnel of roses, stopping at the little wooden gate of which Tom kept the key. This was Tom's own garden; he had planted it, and weeded it, and dug it, and put the palisading round it himself; it was not more than a quarter of an acre in size, but it was full of fruit

and vegetables, which Tom sold to the house with great advantage to himself. I don't mean to say he sold all; Lily was allowed to feast there for lengthened periods, so long as she did not touch the trees set apart for jam or exhibition. And many a good basketful of fruit found its way to the work-house on the hill, or into the mouths of little cottage rogues.

"Now, Lily, go ahead, tuck away as fast as you can, only keep clear of the currant-bush and the red cherry-tree. I'm going to gather a leaf of fruit for Maurice."

Lily "went ahead;" it was astonishing the ravages she could commit on the gooseberry-bushes—her little fingers darted in and out through their thorny branches as glibly as through her tatting threads. She sat down under an amber bush laden with ripe fruit, and gathered and eat, and threw the skins on the walk, till Tom came by with the cabbage-leaf he had been filling.

"I say, what a mess you're making, Lily; can't you throw the skins on the beds instead. Lock the gate after you, when you come out; for I must be off to my grinder."

Lily grew tired presently of the ambers; she wandered on to the black currants, but there were not many of those left, they had been gathered in

the morning to make a condiment, for which the doctor paid Tom generously, and locked it up in his dispensary-room for coughs, and sore throats, and other ailments; she wandered on past Tom's beehives to the raspberry-bed, here there was certainly no stint, she eat until she did not care to eat any more; and then she went down the broad side-walk to look at Tom's prize currant-tree.

It was quite a low stumpy bush; but perfectly weighed down with fruit; beautiful, clear, white currants, hanging in bunches down into the very clay. Tom had put a net over it to keep the birds off, and this prevented Lily from seeing the fruit as well as she might have otherwise done.

She knelt down therefore by the box border, and lifted up a corner of the net.

"Oh! what beauties! I'm sure Tom ought to get the prize. Why, they are nearly as large as cherries. What a pity those under ones are covered with earth."

It was a pity certainly, but not half as great a pity as what came next. Lily had put herself in the way of temptation, and she was tempted. There were a few bunches quite underneath, lying actually on the ground, these she thought she might really take away without injuring the tree. Tom would never think of gathering these for exhibition. And

so she slipped her hand under the boughs and tried to reach them.

But she could not get at the spot, for the main bough of the bush was in the way, with its showers and tangles of fruit. She lifted it up with her right hand, and slipped in the left ; but as she lifted it a little, a very little higher, there was an ominous crack, and the heavy-laden main branch of the currant-tree separated itself from the bush, and fell with a lurch from her hand upon the ground.

Lily started to her feet in a second, and looked all around her in an agony of guilty fear.

She expected at once to hear steps in the garden, or see eyes looking out at her from among the raspberry branches.

"Whatever shall I do ? Oh dear, what will Tom say ?"

There lay the white fork of the broken branch and the crestfallen currants at her feet.

She looked about to see if there was any place where she could hide it. No, not a spot. It would be better to strip the currants off, and break it up into bits, so that no one could know it ; and Lily began to tear the currants off by handfuls and cram them into her mouth. They were not quite ripe, and she had eaten so much fruit already, she had to give up this plan. She was sure now she heard

steps on the gravel at the other side of the garden. She must do something with the broken bough ; she must get rid of it some way, so she carried it away in her arms, right through the mignonette bed, and flung it over the wooden palisade into the lawn beyond.

She came back and drew the net quickly down on the broken tree. There were bunches of currants still lying scattered on the gravel. These she gathered up hastily, and re-crossing the mignonette threw them over the fence into the field, in the same direction.

Her heart was in a terrible flutter still, when she turned down the path and met her father.

" Well, Lily, been hard at work, eh ? I thought, when I saw the gate open, I should find Tom here."

" No ; he went out a few minutes ago. He told me to shut the gate."

" Where is he gone ?"

" I don't know, I am sure."

" Is he gone into town, do you think ?"

" Oh yes ; of course he is. He said he was going to his grinder." Lily's manner was hesitating.

" Why, you seem in the clouds this morning, my little woman."

" No ; but—I have been eating gooseberries, and—and—the sun is so hot."

"Come along, and show me Tom's bush he's keeping for the prize. I shall be in dire disgrace if he hears I was in the garden and did not visit it."

"You won't be able to see it, papa ; it's all covered up with a net."

"Well, I can see the net at any rate, and guess what's underneath it. Which walk is it on, Lily?" And Lily was unwillingly obliged to retrace her steps to the scene of her late disaster.

"Oh ! I see, this little bush at the corner of the bed. Things can be small and good you see, Miss Lily. I shall have to put a net on your head some day, if you grow too wise." Lily was a great favourite with her father, and he patted her white poke bonnet affectionately as he spoke.

"Now, you know, Lily," he continued, "if we were foolish, we would lift a corner of the net and look at the currants ; but we won't do it, for we're sensible people. And, besides, like little Jack Horner, we might be tempted to put in our thumb and take out a plum, and then what would Master Tom say?"

Lily did not answer. She wriggled her head from under her father's hand, and walked on in front, until they reached the garden gate. He locked it, and put the key in his pocket, and they both went into the house.



CHAPTER VI.

THE GREY HOUSE ON THE HILL.



THE Eppingdon workhouse stood on the top of a low hill, almost opposite Dr. Holdsworth's house. Maurice could see it all day long as he sat in the lawn where the cows grazed.

It was very large, and close to the road-side; and even in the brightest part of the day, when the sun was shining on the trees and the green cornfields beyond, its walls looked grey and wintry, and its slates as glassy as if the rain had but just fallen.

Maurice looked across at it often, and often with shuddering interest. He had spent the first week after his mother's death in a London workhouse, and the misery of that time it was not easy for him to forget.

He had had enough to eat there, and enough to drink, and a comfortable bed at night; but his mother's hand and his mother's love had sweetened

the food at home, and a mother's ear had listened to his evening prayer. There he had felt utterly alone among a multitude.

Whenever Maurice looked across at the workhouse on the hill opposite—which he did every five minutes in the day, though he strove not—two scenes rose up out of the past before his mind. One, that evening long ago, when the last link of the home chain had been broken; that evening of childish darkness and despair, when rising from his knees in the grey light of January, and with the “Amen” still on his lips, he found his mother's spirit had gone up with his prayer to God. The smile on the drooping face, the worn hand still holding his,—all rose there so real, that he could see still the pattern of her dress and the folds of her linen apron.

The other, that winter morning, a week later, when the snow lay thick on pavement and house-top, and many feet deep in the workhouse-yard; that morning when Alick, his brother, came and called to him to come out, as he had found work in the town, and could make a home for him. He could feel still the thick throb of his heart as the master turned the key of the workhouse gate and let him out upon the road. If it had not been for that good Master Tom, he might be there now in that

grey building on the hill. And Maurice rose with a shudder from under the oak-tree and went higher up the lawn, close to the wooden palisade of the garden, and sat down to listen for Tom's cheery whistle or his well-known step in the garden within.

He heard it now, and his whole face brightened. He heard Tom's voice, too, speaking to his sister, and the words, "I am going to gather a leaf of fruit for Maurice;" and through the wooden palisading he could see the tall boy bending over the strawberry beds, or plucking the fruit from the raspberry-trees.

When Tom, as we read in our last chapter, had finished gathering the fruit for his charge, he committed the key to Lily, and went in search of Maurice. He had been obliged unwillingly to tell him the contents of Dr. Sharpe's letter, though he did it as kindly as he could, and told him how he was to be allowed to work for him in his garden, once the matter of the five-pound note was cleared up; and it was at Maurice's suggestion Tom had written to the trunkmaker in Beadle Street to find out if by any chance he could have left his basket there.

Maurice saw that Tom believed his word, and this confidence made him cling to him with a tena-

cious love—a love which all the gifts in the world could not have excited in his heart. He looked up at him now as he came across the lawn, with an expression of innocent boyish admiration and delight, that Tom knew was not intended for the leaf of strawberries and raspberries he held in his hand.

“Well, Maurice, it’s all right; I’ve found the fellow in the Directory; ‘Rogers’ is his name, and I’m going to post my letter on my way into town; so I expect to have you in the garden working like a nigger before the week’s out. And I’m going to give you five shillings a-week—that’s to say, I’m going to pay you a shilling, and father says if he’s satisfied with the letter, he’ll make up the rest.”

“Thank you, Master Tom; but I’d rather not take any money from you. I’ll work just as well without it.”

“Nonsense, boy; of course, you must take your money as well as every one else.”

“I’d rather not, really, Master Tom.”

“Don’t be a gabey,” cried Tom, laughing. “If you don’t choose to take it, you may go back to old Sharpe, and see what he’ll say to you.” And Tom put down the leaf of fruit beside him, and hurried across the lawn in the direction of town.

Maurice ate the fruit with relish; little town

tigers are not accustomed to the taste of ripe strawberries or fresh raspberries. They may see them smiling in the shop-windows, with impossible prices affixed, or hear them called about the streets in musical cadence. A pennyworth of hairy gooseberries, gathered up in a pint measure, and rolled into his joined palms, is a London tiger's highest aspiration.

So Maurice regaled like a prince, and tried not to see the workhouse on the hill, which, in the midst of a hot sunshine and the voices of a hundred birds singing from tree to tree, looked as grey and dismal as ever. Maurice did not finish all the fruit he had been given; he laid some aside in the leaf as a present for old rheumatized Nancy, the lodge woman, and lay down in the shade under a lime-tree.

Such a row as the bees were making overhead, singing and droning and buzzing; such a sweet smell from the lime-blossoms, which dropped noiselessly on his face, on his feet, on his coat; such a chattering, whistling, carolling of blackbirds and thrushes; such a bleating of sheep in the pasture and lowing of cattle on the highway; such a sun pouring down through the green leaves overhead,—how could Maurice fall asleep? and yet fall asleep he did, and heavily too.

It was unlike the sleep in the long low room be-

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It was unlike the sleep in the long low room be-

side the pantry, unlike the flare and flicker of the dying dip, unlike the heavy smell of the grease, and the clank of the iron bell. And yet the dream within that curly head, the vision beneath those closed eyes, on whose blue-veined lids the lime-blossoms are resting, is almost the same—yes, always the same—dreaming of Alick, hunting for Alick, crying for Alick, down the dark London streets and up the long London alleys, and always coming on his brother unexpectedly with a row of gleaming medals on his breast.

To-day it is a little different in detail, though always the same motive. He is searching, still searching for Alick, through the wards of the Eppingdon workhouse, in the infirmary, in the schoolroom, in the dining-hall, in the dormitory, in the paved yard, until again he hears a voice call, "Brother, come out!" and there is Alick looking through the bars of the workhouse gate, with his face radiant with comforting smiles, and his scarlet coat covered with medals.

But Maurice's sleep was not destined this time to be of long duration; something came with a swish and a buzz over the garden palings, and Maurice sat up in sleepy surprise to find the broken branch of a currant-bush lying at his feet.

He rubbed his eyes, and looked up into the tree

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from which it seemed to have fallen ; but everything was quiet there except the bees humming and droning among the leaves. While he was still staring and wondering, a handful of currants were again showered over him from the same unseen quarter, covering his face, neck, and arms, and Maurice rose up from under the tree that he might look around him.

There was no one in sight, and he grew every moment more bewildered. He lifted up the branch, which was heavy from the quantity of fruit drooping from the stalks, and hesitated what to do next—whether to bring it at once to the house, or leave it on the spot where he had found it.

While he deliberated, and turned the branch round and round in his hand, he heard one of the cows under his charge crushing through the evergreens in the doctor's pleasure-ground, where it must have strayed while he was sleeping. He did not wait to throw the branch on the ground, but hurried away across the top of the lawn. There were no less than three of the cows trampling among the shrubs and breaking down the flowers in the flower-bed.

Poor Maurice ! this was the doctor's own garden, the one he sat in, and read in, and overlooked himself, and the strictest orders had been given that

the cattle should be kept from this corner of the lawn, as it was not protected by palings.

He tried now to drive them out, but as fast as one was driven back through the evergreens into the lawn, another scampered in among the flowers.

Maurice shouted and rushed to and fro, waving the broken currant branch in his hand. At length they were all driven out save one obstinate Jersey, who made a rush in the opposite direction, and almost thrust her horns in at the doctor's window.

Maurice pursued it, drove it round from the house, and had just succeeded in guiding it out through the laurels, when he heard the doctor's voice calling to him.

He turned at once, and met him stepping out through the glass doors into the garden.

"Maurice, how careless you have been! How did you allow the cattle to get in here? See, they have trampled down all my best flowers; my lilies are ruined, and so are my carnations."

Maurice was both breathless and flushed, and he cast his eyes on the ground in shame and sorrow.

"Maurice, what is that in your hand? what do I see in your hand, sir?" The doctor's voice had suddenly changed from sorrow over his flowers, to anger.

"I don't know, sir. I don't know where it came

from," hesitated Maurice, frightened by the doctor's manner and words.

"Where did you get that branch of currants?—no equivocation—no lies—tell me at once," and the doctor took the bough somewhat roughly from Maurice's hand.

No lies! Oh, poor Maurice, how his heart leaped up at the accusation. "I found it," he sobbed; "I found it under the tree when I awoke; I did indeed, sir; every one can tell you that I did."

Maurice scarcely knew what he said in his terrified grief. Who did he mean by "every one?" The bees in the limes could have told that it was so; the birds in the trees could have borne witness to his truth, and one other—but, alas! she was not likely to come forward to his rescue.

"Follow me, sir," said the doctor, striding on in front of poor Maurice, "and show me where you found this branch."

Maurice pointed out the lime-tree, close to the white palisading at the head of the lawn, and the doctor pushed on towards it.

Bunches of currants were strewn over the grass beneath it, and stalks of strawberries and raspberries.

He stood silently looking at them for a few moments, while the dandelions on the grass grew as large as suns through the tears in Maurice's eyes.

"Poor Tom ! poor Tom ! this will be a sad blow for him when he comes home. Maurice, you must go down at once to the lodge, and wait till he returns. You are an ungrateful, deceiving boy, and I can no longer allow you to remain in this place ; go down to the lodge. I was foolish, after all I heard of your past conduct, to allow you to stay here. Tom over-persuaded me, and this is his reward," and Dr. Holdsworth held up the now drooping branch of the currant-tree.


Maurice's heart was too full to speak ; but he said to himself, as he walked down the lawn to the lodge, "Master Tom will believe me."





CHAPTER VII.

ALICK'S PARROT.

 TOM walked home from town with a light step and a joyous heart, whistling as he went. He was bringing home a surprise for Maurice, and he looked forward to the boy's grateful delight. Drewitt, the boot-maker, had given him Alick's grey parrot, and Tom was carrying it home in his right hand, while under his left arm he held the bag of hemp-seed he had just bought at the seed-shop in Hanley Street.

Occasionally he stopped and put down the cage to rest himself, or to burst into a splutter of laughter over Polly's ridiculous remarks.

The bird had been very silent when first carried out into the open air, shuffling itself up and down its perch and craning its neck; but as it got more into the country, and grew accustomed to the swinging motion of Tom's arm, it began to sneeze and cough so exactly after the manner of old Drewitt,

that Tom put down the cage and laughed, till a crowd collected around them.

As he drew near his home quite a struggle got up in his breast whether he should give it away or no. "It would be so awfully jolly to have it up in one's own room, and teach it no end of queer things; but self did not often prevail with our old Tom, and he tramped up the side walk to the lodge with a steady, cheerful step.

He was going to put it standing in the window of Maurice's room, and say nothing about it till the boy came down in the evening and saw it for himself; so he only remarked that it was a fine afternoon to old Nancy, who was blowing the kitchen fire, and walked on, but as he put the cage down to turn the handle of the door, Maurice himself opened it and came out to meet him.

"Master Tom—"

"Well, what's happened now?" and Tom looked up in surprise at Maurice's tear-swollen face and quivering lip, and in some dudgeon, it must be confessed, that his surprise should have lost the grand effect he intended it to produce.

"Master Tom, I did not do it; indeed, Master Tom, I tell the truth, I did not do it."

"Do what?" asked Tom, rather sharply; for he was both puzzled and annoyed.

"The doctor says I broke your currant-bush. He says I must have done it ; but indeed, indeed, I found it on the grass beside the tree."

Tom's countenance fell. What was this about the currant-bush ? He scarcely dared to question the trembling boy before him.

"Indeed, Master Tom," said Maurice pleadingly, as he took one of Tom's brown hands in his, "I found it on the grass when I awoke, and the cows had got into the flower-garden, and I ran after them, and the doctor found it in my hand, and said I must go away and not stay here any more. But, please, you'll believe me, won't you ?"

"I don't quite understand," replied Tom, huskily ; "but I do believe you're telling the truth, Maurice. I can't think you'd spoil all my fun for the sake of a few currants."

"You won't send me away from you, Master Tom ?"

"Not if I can help it, Maurice. I must go up though, and see father first. There, I brought you that from the town ; it was your brother's, and I thought you'd like to have it," and Tom shoved the cage into Maurice's hand, and went down the walk very red in the face and gloomy looking.

Was it *the* currant-bush that had been broken, and, if so, who had broken it ? It was not Maurice ;

Tom felt sure of that. He had left the key of the garden gate with Lily; could she have left it open? could she have done worse? could *she* have broken the tree? He could not help this horrible suspicion from forming in his mind, for Lily had a very sweet tooth and a very weak nature; but he would not condemn her unheard, so he made a short cut across the lawn, and went straight through the hall into his father's study.

"Well, Tom, my boy, have you seen Maurice?" and Dr. Holdsworth looked up gravely from his writing and laid down his pen, motioning to Tom to sit down.

"Yes, I did; the poor little chap is in a terrible way down there, but I don't understand yet what has happened."

"Tom, you must not waste your pity on that boy; there is not a shadow of doubt now about his dishonesty. I actually found the branch of currants in his hand; and when I asked him where he got it, he grew quite red and confused, and said he did not know—he could not tell where it came from. When I pressed him, he said he had found it under a tree; and when I made him show me the spot, I found the ground all strewn with bunches of currants and stalks of raspberries and strawberries."

"I gave him those myself, sir," cried Tom, hotly.

"Patience, dear boy, patience for a moment ; you surely did not give him half your white currant-bush ?"

Then it was the prize currant-tree after all. Tom drew a deep breath. He was a tall, long-legged boy, with a broad chest and a brave heart, but his eyes grew decidedly red and watery. "I gave the key, like a fool, to Lily. How do I know that she—"

"Tom, my dear."

Tom blushed up and kicked the leg of the table with his clumsy boot. "I don't and won't believe he did it." Tom did not like to lose everything at the same moment ; he was losing his temper, he had lost his prize, but he wanted to keep Maurice's love and the charge he had been given.

"Tom, my boy, do sit down and listen to me quietly. You surely would not wish to thrust the blame and crime off Maurice's head, who is a comparative stranger, I may say, on to your own sister's. But, fortunately, I have it in my power to prove to you that she is perfectly innocent. I went into your garden a few minutes after you had set off to town, and found Lily there. We went together to look at your tree, which was netted securely down as you left it yourself. We were anxious to see the fruit, but we thought it wiser not

to stir it. Lily came out of the garden with me; I locked the gate and put the key in my pocket, and we both went into the house. She brought her books in here and sat with me for a short time, when, hearing a noise in the garden outside, I looked up and saw the cattle had made their way in, and were trampling down all my flowers."

Tom looked out into the pleasure-grounds as his father spoke, and noticed the broken carnations and trampled roses.

"I stepped out," continued his father, "to drive them away, and found Maurice flourishing the broken branch of the currant-tree in his hand, which evidently, in his fright at discovering the mischief the cattle were doing, he had forgotten to hide or throw away. You know the rest, except that sent Lily into the garden at once, who found you = currant-bush literally smashed in two."

Tom had not a word to say; he drew out his pocket-handkerchief, and used it sonorously. "What are you going to do?" at last he asked, with something between a gulp and a cough.

"I am going to take the boy—if that is what you mean—to the workhouse this evening, and put him under the care of the master."

"The workhouse!" gasped Tom.

"Yes, my dear Tom; what else can I do? I

not keep him myself ; I cannot recommend him any one else ; and I cannot let him starve."

"The workhouse !" again groaned poor Tom ;
"you won't wait now till we hear from the trunk-
ker ?"

"What use ? what use ? he has clearly proved
himself a rogue ; besides, if we needed further wit-
ness, we have Dr. Sharpe's letter."


"Bother Dr. Sharpe !" ejaculated Tom into the
sleeve of his red calico handkerchief, as he gave his
face a kind of universal polish and went out of the
room suddenly.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOCTOR'S FIAT.

 TOM had not the heart to go down and meet Maurice again. He had been into the garden and seen his broken tree ; had noticed the mignonette bed which he had sown on purpose for his bees all trampled down to the very edge of the white palisading ; he had climbed it, and found bunches of white currants strewed on the ground between the paling and the lime-tree ; and with a twinge of regret, entirely unmixed with selfish sorrow, he had come to the conclusion that Maurice must have been the thief.

What a shower of terrible blows to fall on a fellow all at once : the loss of his prize, the loss of his fruit, the loss of his glory, and of the boy-love which had grown so dear to his heart lately ; and Tom trampled on the currant branch with his heel as he thought of Maurice's blue truthful eyes, and had to acknowledge him a rogue.

He did not know what to do, poor Tom, or where to go. There was no pleasure in his garden for him to-day, and he dreaded entering the school-room and meeting Lily, lest she might triumph over him, or condole with him, which would be almost worse.

However, he was too unhappy to go moping about doing nothing, so he made up his mind to encounter Lily, and if she annoyed him, why, he would laze out at her, and perhaps in this manner get rid of his dudgeon.

So he pushed open the study door defiantly and went in, ready at a moment's notice to "let slip the dogs of war."

But Lily was very quiet, very subdued; her head was bent over her slate, and she neither triumphed nor consoled.

Tom threw himself down on the sofa and grunted. Lily looked up furtively, but resumed her attentive attitude, with her fingers thrust up through her hair and her curls touching the slate. "Eight and seven make fifteen, and fifteen and nine make twenty-four, and twenty-four pence are two shillings," she muttered, tapping on the slate with the point of her pencil and drawing a hasty line.

"Bother fifteen and twenty-four, and everything else! can't you put down your slate and say you're sorry for a fellow?"

Lily did not put down her slate, but she put down her head lower and lower, till her curls almost hid her face.

"I believe you don't care for any one but yourself," said Tom, shuffling round on the sofa; "a precious way you'd be in, if it had all happened to you."

But Lily was evidently not in a fighting mood; she remained stonily silent—the most aggravating form a ruffled spirit can assume—at least Tom found it so.

"Sulk, sulk, sulk, from morning to night, shutting up your mouth when you ought to speak, and speaking when you ought to shut up. There's my currant-bush smashed in two, my prize lost, of course, and the little chap going off to the work-house, and you go on with your two and two make four, as if you did not care one pin."

Lily looked up suddenly for a moment as Tom finished his tirade, then snatched up her slate and hurried out of the room without a word; but Tom caught the sound of a bursting sob in the passage, and the echo of two or three more as she went hastily up the staircase.

Tom's blaze had been more successful than he wished, and he cooled down at once. He got up off the sofa and went out into the hall, intending to

follow Lily and apologize ; but here he was stopped by his father. "Tom, my boy, I shall want you to drive over with me to John Hall's this afternoon. I hear he has hurt his leg badly, and I may want your assistance."

"Very well, sir."

"I shall stop at the workhouse as we go by, and give Maurice Browne into the charge of the master. You had better go now and speak to him, and tell him what I have arranged."

Tom grew very red and hesitated. "I had rather not, if you please, sir."

"Why not, Tom?"

"Because I could not—indeed I could not. Please, father, don't ask me."

"Very well, I shall send down for him and speak to him myself. I thought perhaps a few judicious words from you, Tom, might soften him before going away ; but if you would rather not, I, of course, won't press you."

"I could not, really, father ; when I look at Maurice's face, I can't help believing every word he says, and telling him so."

"Very well ; perhaps, if so, it is better I should speak to him myself."

Dr. Holdsworth turned into his study, and Tom walked slowly up the stairs to the door of Lily's

room. He heard her still sobbing, so he turned the handle and went in.

Lily had thrown herself on her bed, and her curls hung over the pillow like a tossed mane.

"Lily, old girl, what's the row? Was it what I said to you down-stairs that has cut you up so awfully?—because, if so, I did not mean it."

"No," sobbed Lily; "it is not that."

"Well, what then? Is it because you don't know your lessons for Miss Turner?"

"No, no, not that either," still gulped Lily.

"Is it about the currant-bush then?"

"No; but—but—but I don't want Maurice to—be—sent to the workhouse." And here followed a fresh explosion of grief on Lily's part.

Tom was quite softened by this unexpected burst of feeling, and he lifted up his sister's hand kindly.

"Could not you beg him off, Tom?" she continued, squeezing his fingers.

"I am afraid there is no use; father is quite determined to send him away."

"But could not you try, Tom? If you begged of him, I am sure he would forgive him just this one time."

"I am afraid there is not the least use, but I'll go down by-and-by and try."

Tom was right; there was not the least use. Dr.

orth had had the boy up to his study, and
ed again in making him confess, and all
treaties could not move him from the course
resolved on—that of sending Maurice to the
ise, and leaving him there till he showed
ns of repentance.

dear Lily," he said to his tearful daughter,
sat down to luncheon, "if you or Tom had
the deceitful way Maurice has done, I
punish you quite as severely, though the
of course, would be different. I wonder
conduct does not fill you both with the
rror it does me."

this, Lily said no more; but neither she
brother eat much—Tom growing lower and
very moment at the thought that he must
Maurice's removal to the workhouse; and
heart aching with the bitterest of all pains—

Tom, Lily's own self was her dearest
for it she thought and planned from the
she got up in the morning till she went to
night: how to feed self with the daintiest
icest morsels; how to dress self well, so that
t be both comfortable and attractive; and
amuse and gratify self by fair means or by

No wonder Tom was filled with amazement at her pity and grief for another.

After luncheon, the phaeton came round, and Tom, with a heavy heart, stepped in, and took the seat beside his father.

They stopped at the gate lodge, and Maurice came out with a small bundle in his hand. Tom looked another way as he got up beside the groom and drove on.

It was no great distance to the workhouse ; down one steep hill and up another, and in about five minutes they stood before its heavy iron gates.

Not a word had been spoken. Maurice had waited and watched for one look, one comforting glance, from Master Tom ; but even now, though the carriage had stopped, though there was only one minute before he should be shut out from happiness and home, Tom still looked straight before him at the white road and the white houses beyond.

The groom got down first, and rang the bell, every clang of which seemed to split the aching head and aching heart of poor Maurice.

The doctor descended next, giving the reins into Tom's hands ; and then there was a pause. Would not Tom turn round and speak now ?

" Maurice, get down."

"Wo, pet," cried Tom, though the horse stood
pidly still.

Maurice clambered down, and walked towards
e gate; his face was white as death, and his
nees trembled beneath him.

Here was the old porter, with head bent and
cythe-like limbs, coming to open the gates and let
hem in. Tom must look round now. No; he
was settling the carriage cushions and brushing some
ust from his coat.

The gates are open now, and the doctor, followed
y Maurice, walks in; the porter closes them again,
nd turns the key.

They walk on slowly, gravely, till the doctor
isses the little footstep behind him. "Maurice,
me on."

But Maurice is not coming on; he is standing at
ie gate, with his white hands thrust out implor-
gly. His sobs are shaking even the heart of the
ow-legged porter.

"Master Tom! dear Master Tom! turn round."

"I can't," cried Tom huskily, drawing the car-
iage plaid over his knees.

"Master Tom, you promised you'd love me!"

Then Tom, remembering his promise, threw the
eins on the back of the old grey horse, and jumped
out; he lifted the dimpled hand stretched out

through the bars, and looked into Maurice's blue eyes.

"There's my hand, Maurice, my boy, and tell the truth. I cannot love you if you do not tell the truth."

"I did not do it, Master Tom ; I tell the truth."

Then Tom dropped the hand again, turned away and mounted the phaeton, while Maurice, seeing nothing, knowing nothing, save that the porter held him by the arm, was led into the master's room, and enrolled as a member of the workhouse.





CHAPTER IX.

BAD NEWS FOR TOM.



TOM was waiting at the gate for the postman ; sitting on the wooden pillars with his legs hanging down, making faces at the little urchins tramping onward to school ; or taking off his cap civilly to the old men who blessed him as they passed by.

He was very sad this morning, poor Tom ; he had slept badly, and had a horrid dream with his eyes open, of Maurice calling to him, and stretching out his arms to him through the rails at the foot of his bed. He had jumped up to seize them, when they went to nothing in his hand, and Maurice seemed to fall backwards on the floor. Tom sprang out of bed to raise him up, and found it was nothing but his own shirt which was lying on the ground. The dream, however, had been too vivid, and Tom could sleep no more.

The postman was always late when any one was

on the look-out for him, and Tom drew his *watch* in and out a dozen times in five minutes.

He was awaiting anxiously the reply from *the* trunkmaker in Beadle Street, with the desperate hope it might satisfy his father, and a yearning desire that it might satisfy himself; but there was no sign of the letter-carrier coming down the road, and Tom grew impatient.

"Won't I blow the fellow up—just see if I won't. I'm certain he's taking a read of our *Times* as he walks along the road."

"Are you watching for Silas to come up with the letters, Master Tom dear?" cried old Nancy, coming down the garden walk from her lodge in her very thick boots and rather short petticoats. "He gets later every day I'm thinkin'."

"Yes; his father must have been a snail, judging by the pace he goes," grunted Tom, kicking the pillar idly with his heels.

"And so the poor little boy's gone; and I'm sorry for it," continued old Nancy, shaking her *mo* cap sadly. "And he'd rather, I'm thinkin', have gone to his grave than that ere house on the hill. I didn't think you'd have let him go there, Master Tom."

"I could not help it," replied Tom gruffly.

"The best boy, as I say," continued the old

Tom, leaning on the gate—"the best boy, as I say—said his prayers night and morning as reg'lar as the clock, and kissed me before ever he'd lie down in his bed o' nights, though I'm an old woman and as ugly as you please. And, 'See here, Nancy,' he says before he went away, though he could hardly speak for the sobbing; 'there's the parrot Master Tom gave me, and you'll feed it well and take care of it; and if you want money to buy its food, here's a sovereign I've got.' And he puts his hand in his pocket and takes out a goold piece and gives it to me; and, 'Nancy,' says he, 'Alick bid me trust in God, and I'll try to do it; and I daresay He'll make all clear in the end.'"

"I wonder where he got the sovereign from," cried Tom, with a sudden start.

"How could I tell you, dear? But of this I'm certain: his true word is as plain before the sight of God as I am this minute."

"Here's the postman.—You're a nice fellow, ain't you?" And Tom, dropping down off the gate, took the letters from Silas's hand. "One for me, eh?"

"Yes, sir." And the postman touched his cap with a civil smile, and walked on.

"Hold them, Nancy, till I read this one," cried Tom excitedly; "perhaps this may set him all right."

Nancy took the letters from Tom's hand, and watched with a curious eye his face as he tore open the envelope, and read with some difficulty its contents.

But with every line Tom's countenance fell lower and lower. The trunkmaker had no recollection of any boy sitting outside his shop on a trunk, though it was possible a boy might have done so without his knowledge; was sure he had never been given a letter to read about a brother having enlisted, or anything of the kind; and was morally certain he never asked a boy to sit down on his sofa, as he had neither back-parlour or sofa belonging to his premises.

"Nancy."

"Well, Master Tom."

"There is no use saying another word. That boy has been telling lies from the beginning of the chapter to the end; and now, listen to me till I tell you something."

"Yes, Master Tom."

"I'll never trust any one again, Nancy. I don't think I'd lend my own father two halfpennies if he asked me for them."

"Don't say that, Master Tom."

"I do say it though; and I'd say worse if I could think of anything worse to say." And Tom

took the letters from Nancy's wrinkled hand, and strode up the avenue.

He threw the trunkmaker's letter on the table before his father, put the others on the desk, and walked into the school-room ; he took his Euclid, his Algebra, and his Greek Grammar from the shelf, and slapped them on the table with a bang.

"What's the matter, Tom dear?" asked Lily, looking up deprecatingly ; "see, you have made me cross my *t* twice with the shake you gave the table."

"Well, cross it four times more, for all I care ; you're always crossing some one or other, so it won't come new to you."

"What's happened, Tom? I'm sure something has happened which you won't tell me."

"Shut up, I say ; I'm not going to tell you, you would not care sixpence if I did."

"I would indeed, Tom," replied Lily, meekly ; she had been astonishingly meek since yesterday, and besides, her curiosity was roused.

"Well, then, I have had a letter to say Maurice is a humbug, and the story about the trunkmaker is all rubbish, and the whole thing is an invention ; and I'll never believe another word any one says ; if you went down on your knees and swore your

name was Lily Holdsworth, I would not believe you ; so now——”

Lily flushed crimson at the mention of Maurice's name, then drew a deep breath ; for after all it was pleasanter to hear that Maurice had really been a very wicked boy and deserved to be sent to the workhouse, than to think he was good and honest, and that she had been the means of ruining him.

So dear self was relieved by the tidings in this letter, and Lily's face on the instant lost something of its newly acquired meekness.

“There, I knew you would be glad,” said Tom gruffly ; then opening his dog-eared Euclid and setting his elbows on the table, he began his work.

But it did not seem to make much progress : he hummed and grunted and whistled over the open page of his book, or repeated the words of the proposition vaguely, till at length he broke forth into doggerel, heralded by a deep sigh——

“Heigh ho, Lily,
I never loved a wild gazebo,
To cheer me with its roundelay,
But when it came to know and love me
It was always sure to be sent away.”

“Do you know that's all as true as anything, Lily ; I've just been thinking it over. There was

my dog Turk—the finest dog that ever was seen ; just when I had taught him to shut the door and fetch my slippers, and go round after his own tail like a bird, it knocks an old woman down in the avenue, and is sent away. Then there was my Manx cat—the greatest beauty in the world—without a morsel of a tail, disappeared in one night. I am sure old cook sent her away, because she said it did not look like a Christian. Then there was my pet mouse. I believe I sat down on that myself by accident. But now there's Maurice—”

Lily sighed.

Tom looked up at her.

“Are you sorry, really sorry, Maurice is gone, Lily ? ”

“I am indeed, Tom.”

“Then you're a brick, that's what you are, and I'm a brute. I'm always thinking good of bad people, and bad of good people. I believe I was born with my head turned the wrong way, or my brains upside down; but you see, Lily, what cuts me up so awfully is to think what a crafty little fellow he must be to look so true and good, and to tell lies faster than you could eat gooseberries. If you had only seen him yesterday afternoon at the work-house gate, why it would have melted the heart of a stone. When I lifted his hand it was perfectly

clammy with fear, and the tears which ran out of his eyes were as large as the buttons on your frock. I would have gone down on my knees before all the paupers to have got him out, if he had just taken courage to speak the truth ; but no, he declared he had not done it, and I was obliged to turn away, for I could not bear to look at him."

"Do you think he will be very unhappy there, Tom ?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Old Nancy says he'd rather have gone to his grave ; and if you were to listen to her talking about him ! How he used to say his prayers every night and morning, and kiss her ; and how he said he would trust in God, and He would make things come clear ; and of course," added Tom thoughtfully, "if he is innocent all will come clear, that's one comfort,— '*Magna est veritas et prævalabit !*'"

"I hate your always speaking Latin or poetry which I don't understand," murmured Lily disconsolately.

" '*Magna est veritas et prævalabit,*'—Great is truth, and it will prevail ; that's the meaning, if you want to know," and Tom busied himself temporarily printing in large letters his favourite motto on the cover of his book.

This done he set himself industriously to work—

for he had a heavy day's business in town before him: two hours with his grinder, a lecture at the hospital, and a walk down to the Eppingdon gardens, where the flower-show was soon to be held; for though Tom could not exhibit his currant-tree he was in hopes that he might come in for some small prize for the fruit which still remained on it, and he wished to find out exactly the proper time for sending in his samples.

But Lily's work for the morning was quite upset, the burden Tom had shoved off his shoulder had fallen heavily on hers, and was weighing her down, so that she could not study or follow the intricacies of her German grammar.

Tom had said two things which pained her extremely. One, that Maurice would rather be in his grave than the workhouse; the other, that if he were innocent God would make all clear. This last thought caused her by far the greater uneasiness.

She had felt so secure up to this time, and yet wretched in her security. Now Tom seemed confident, and even Maurice trusted, that God would make all clear in the end.

Lily was not accustomed to trust in God; she trusted in herself—she was both clever and shrewd, and had wriggled out of many a difficult situation before now; but she had a great respect for Tom's

maxims, and fear of detection began again to loom heavily over her heart.

How could it be found out ; no one had seen her break the branch,—if they had some one would have come forward before this to bear testimony against her. It could not be found out without a miracle, unless the trees or the birds were given tongues to accuse her, and miracles never happened now-a-days. Yet, for all that, Tom was confident, and he was generally right.

Thus Lily turned over and over in her mind the difficulties and chances of her situation, instead of the leaves of her German grammar, and sighed and wondered what Tom would say if she were to tell straight out now all that had happened, and that she was the culprit, and not Maurice.

She pictured the whole scene so vividly—how Tom's face would crimson all over—how his eyes would flash—how his reproaches would blaze forth,—she pictured all this so vividly, that when Tom did look up suddenly and throw a piece of paper at her face which he had been crumpling in his fingers, she gave quite a piercing cry, and burst into tears.

Tom vowed he could not make head or tail of her ; that she was the most wonderful girl for starting and blushing and crying, he ever came across. Called her a lachrymal duck, and a piping

vhale; and at last, with his lurching awkward school-boy gait, came lumbering round the study table, flucked up her tear-blotched face, and kissed her on the very tip of her "Roman nose," as he maliciously called it.





CHAPTER X.

THE EPPINGDON FLOWER-SHOW.

“**L**ILY, of course you’re coming to the flower-show this afternoon.”

“No, I don’t think I am, Tom.”

“Why not?”

“I’ve got no hat to wear; besides I don’t care the least to see it.”

“Humbug, no hat?—why, you have six dozen hats at the very least; and as to not caring, that is greater rubbish still.”

“It’s not rubbish, Tom; even if I had a hat, I’d rather not go there,” and Lily really spoke as if she meant it.

“Why not, my darling?” asked her father, laying the *Times* down on the breakfast-table; “what would a flower-show be without our Lily, eh?” and he put his arm round his little daughter and drew her towards him.

Lily blushed painfully and made no response.

if her father knew all! Yes; if he only knew all that was in her heart, would he draw her towards him so affectionately? would old Tom, too, look so disconsolate at her threatened absence?

"Why, I intend to get the prize for my Lily," continued Dr. Holdsworth, pleasantly; "she must be put in a flower-pot after breakfast, and sent down in the barrow with Tom's goods; there need be no difficulty then about a hat, a lily needs but to be spotless, upright, and pure to gain a prize; eh! my girlie, what do you say?"

"I know what I say," cried Tom, laughing; "I won't have a Lily with arms and fingers growing out of them going down in the cart with my currants—*experientia docet*."

Lily had blushed so much, she could blush no longer; she grew quite pale and sick, first at her father's words and then at Tom's; she put the honey spoon into the mustard pot in her confusion, and murmured, "Tom, how can you say such things? you know I wouldn't do it." Then, in worse confusion still, conveyed the mustard to her mouth; this brought on such a fit of coughing, spluttering, and choking, that her confusion was covered for the time, and after breakfast she made her escape to her own room. Tom meantime hurried out to his garden to gather his fruit for the show; there was a good leaf

full of currants left on the prize bush still, though the best bunches were gone; and then there were his cherries; his carrots, his early carrots, the best in England, according to his own view of the case.

He felt a good deal excited as he placed his treasures in the cart carefully, and walked beside it keeping pace with the one-eyed donkey, whose gait was too slow to suit his present frame of mind.

When he got opposite the workhouse, however, at the curve of the avenue, his spirits sank a good deal and his excitement began to cool down; he looked across among the crowd of grey bees who were moving about its precincts to see if he could recognize Maurice, but unless he were that little fellow sitting on a flight of stone steps with his face covered by his hands he could not tell.

Poor Tom, this cloud remained over him all the long walk into Eppingdon. The thought of Maurice pining and drooping among a host of rough unsympathizing boys—the remembrance of that little hand stealing into his, the blue eyes looking up with innocent confidence, the pleading question “Master Tom, you’ll love me, won’t you?” and the scene at the workhouse gate,—these dogged our poor friend as he tramped along under the sunny hedge-rows, and switched the thistles with his cane.

But as he neared the town, his spirits revived again ; he passed the barracks, saw the bandsmen assembling, who were to play in the Eppingdon gardens from twelve till six, the finest band in the three kingdoms, as Tom told the donkey-boy confidentially. "When they banged their brass things together, you'd think the world was coming to an end, with the jolly row they made."

Then the town itself had such a busy, happy look: the sun was shining on the church at one end of the main street, and on the people's-fountain at the other ; the shops seemed unusually gay, and the customers numerous for so early an hour.

Tom could not delay long to stare at his favourite "new patent bee-hives exhibited for sale," for he had to keep his eye on the cart to see that none of the town boys robbed his goods ; but he did linger a moment and wonder whether, if he gained second prize for his currants, his father might perhaps make up the sum needful for their purchase ; and once again he stopped at a milliner's window, where hung a gorgeous hat resplendent with the stuffed body of a bird of paradise.

"Why ! ain't it a beauty just ? I wonder how they do contrive to stick the whole bird on in that way ? I say, would not Lily look a swell if I bought that for her and brought it home under

my arm ?—I say, old lady, what's the price ?" asked Tom, ducking his head suddenly in at the door.

The old lady, who was a girl about the same age as himself, responded with a laugh, and brief question as to which article he meant.

"The grey hat with a bird on it with no end of a stunning tail."

"Is it this one you mean?" asked a somewhat sour-visaged dame who sat nearer the window, as she lifted the hat off its hook and held it up in her hand.

"The very one; what's the damage?" asked Tom quickly, sticking the hat for a moment on the top of his shock head; "look alive, will you, or the donkey will have turned the corner of the street."

"Thirty shillings," replied the old woman with a terrible accession of grimness, as she fancied Tom was making fun of her.

"Thirty shillings! you're a shocking old woman to charge so much; but, never mind, keep it till I come back, will you?" and Tom disappeared from her gaze in a twinkling.

The hat was replaced in the window with a muttered growl and an indignant toss of the head. "Keep it for him indeed; don't I see myself keeping it for him, or him coming back either!" But the old lady was wrong for once at least in her

life, for an hour had scarcely elapsed when Tom burst into her shop again.

"Well, you have not sold it, have you?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, give us it here; I'll buy it from you, — upon my word I will;" as Tom saw the woman's undisguised hesitation. "I can't pay you the money to-day, because I have not got it; but I've just won two prizes at the show, and the day after to-morrow you shall have it, as sure as my name's Tom Holdsworth."

At the name of Holdsworth the grim muscles relaxed; Tom's father had been very kind to this woman's son, and grim as she was, she could feel grateful for past kindness.

"Shall I put it in a box for you, sir?"

"No, thank you; just stick some paper round it, and cover up the tail so that she mayn't know what it is."

"Yes, sir; why, I scarcely knew you, Master Tom, you've grown so tall." Her own son, poor woman, would have been just about as tall if he had lived.

"I hope your father is well, sir."

"Tip top, thank you," and Tom took the hat from her hand, and went down the street at a pace which made the small boys look round to see whatever he was after.

Lily was not in the school-room nor study, so Tom bolted up-stairs to her bedroom; but she was not there either, though she must have been there lately, for her best hat lay on the table with its trimmings all picked off and turned inside out, with a view to giving it a more dandy appearance—there was a very home-made rosette puckered up all to one side, and a peacock's feather protruding in solitary grandeur from the hat itself. Lily's desk, too, lay open, and on it a sheet of paper, and beside it a pen still wet with ink.

"My dear Tom, I want so much to tell you something, only I—" Tom could not help seeing the words, nor noticing the most undeniable tear with serrated edges into which the ink was oozing at one corner. He wondered whatever the girl was at, but was too full of the surprise he had prepared for her to give much time to this new wonder.

He found her at last in the little summer-house at the top of the hollyhock walk; he first saw the flutter of her pink muslin skirt, and then he burst in.

She was in tears—poor Lily! tears in her eyes—tears on her cheeks—tears on the backs of her little red hands, whose fingers she twisted assiduously together. She gave a little start and cry when she saw Tom's beaming face looking in upon her, and a fresh flood of tears rolled over her cheeks.

“What is the row, Lily?” asked Tom, standing opposite her with the brown paper parcel under his arm. “What are you sitting here blubbering for? come along in and stick on some better dress than this, for I’m going to take you to the show.”

“I can’t go,” sobbed Lily, almost angrily; “I’ve got no hat; I don’t want to go, I told you so before.”

“Why need you wear a hat, old girl, with the lots of beautiful hair you’ve got, eh?” and Tom began to shuffle down the parcel from under his arm. “Why, if you had only been at the show, I’d never have got the prize for my carrots.”

“For shame, Tom, you’re very unkind,” and Lily tried to push him away with her arm.

“Am I? look here, Lily!” and Tom jerked the hat out of its wrapper with astonishing agility. “How do you think that will suit the child? There, don’t look like a petrified baboon; I bought you that down at the old lady’s in Nelson Street. Stick it on your head and come off with me now.”

Lily could scarcely believe the hat was for her; Tom had to assure her of the fact over and over again, but even then she hesitated about accompanying him to the show.

“If you go on taking these staggers, Lily, I’ll have no more to say to you,” cried Tom in some

disappointment; "can't you look a little more alive, and chum up with a fellow?" So Lily went up and put on her flounced silk dress, and went with Tom to the show.

On the way there, just opposite the Eppingdon school-house, Tom stopped her for a moment, saying gaily: "What's the secret, Lily? what is it you want so much to say to me, only you something or another?"

Lily started and half withdrew her hand from Tom's arm, with an impulse to turn round and fly home, but Tom caught the tips of her fingers with his elbow, and held them tight to his side.

"Well, if you don't choose to tell, I don't want to know; but I could not help reading a thing when you leave it out under my very eyes. I wouldn't have said anything about it, only I thought it wouldn't be quite honest and all that sort of thing; and besides, perhaps, if I could help you any way, or all the other sort of thing; so if you underconstumble me, old girl, say so, and if you don't, why, shut up."

Lily did shut up: she did not say a word of any kind for several minutes, she was thinking how she could say it—how she could tell it, framing the sentences, half opening her mouth to begin, and losing courage as the first word trembled on her lips.

"A penny for your thoughts!" cried Tom joyously; "but, I say then, do you hear? The band has begun to play—step out."

When Tom stepped out, it was no joke, and Lily trotted on by his side breathless and red.

The flower-show was a splendid one; the carriages stood all day long in an unbroken line outside the Eppingdon pleasure-gardens; the bandsmen played as if they knew Tom had got first prize for his carrots—insomuch that Tom felt constrained to lift his cap slightly to the bandmaster, and say "Thank you, sir," when they had finished "See the conquering hero comes."


But Lily could not get up her spirits; the music seemed to make everything appear twice as wretched: she thought of poor little Maurice up in the work-house-yard; of Nancy's words, that he would rather be in his grave; of his trust that God would make all clear, and she fell into dismal realizations of her father's stern grief and Tom's hasty reproaches, till some passer-by chucked the gorgeous tail of the bird of paradise, and Lily awoke to a sense of her own grandeur, and was comforted.





CHAPTER XI.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

 THE flower-show was over and all the excitement which had preceded it, and the routine of the Holdsworth household was resumed.

Tom worked at his lessons and in his garden as usual, and was warm-hearted, impetuous, and generous as ever; but Lily, the guilty Lily, pined and moped, and grew careless of both lessons and play; she never now visited Tom's garden unless he insisted on her accompanying him.

Every one about the place observed the variable-ness of her spirits. In the midst of a burst of laughter at some absurd joke of Tom's, her face would cloud over and the tears come into her eyes. Miss Turner spoke to her father, saying it was in vain to teach her, as the lessons went in at one ear and went out at the other; she could not get Lily to fix her attention for five minutes at a time.

Tom vowed she was nothing but a weeping crocodile, though he lavished all his clumsy love on her, and seldom came back from town without some present which he thought might cheer her or please her. But one day he also laid her case seriously before his father.

He had begged of Lily that morning to accompany him to the workhouse, to leave a bunch of flowers for Maurice (poor Tom had never gained sufficient courage to see Maurice again). Lily had refused and implored to be left at home, pleading headache and every other ache she could think of: however Tom had dragged and coaxed her at last into acquiescence.

But half way up the workhouse hill she had suddenly come to a stand-still, refused to go further, and leaning against a holly hedge, had sobbed and cried and wrung her hands, regardless of the numerous passers-by, some of whom stopped and offered their condolence or assistance.

Tom vowed he would never ask her to go out with him again, as all the people must have thought he had been beating her; and when he got her home and within the house, went straight off to speak and consult with his father, who summoned Lily into his study.

Lily came down pale and dejected, but her

answers to his questions threw no light on her unnatural demeanour. He took her on his knee, stroked her curls, pressed her head against his breast, asked in a low voice whether she had any trouble, any little sorrow at her heart she could share with him, any burden she could lay on his shoulder instead of her own; and willingly he would have borne any burden or suffering for his much-loved Lily—his gentle, guileless, innocent, now drooping Lily, as in his great affection he blindly reckoned her. When she had loosened the friendly grasp of his arm and glided out of the room, he sat there thinking, puzzling, planning, until he seemed satisfied with the resolution he had taken; and drawing over his desk, wrote, folded, and sealed a letter, asking his sister living far away down on the breezy Cornwall coast, to take his drooping Lily, and cherish her for a time.

At dinner the trio were silent and sad: the house was not so full and cheerful that the doctor could well spare this precious daughter, who sat in the chair now and always by his side, where her mother had sat in days gone by, and again and again he stroked his daughter's hair affectionately, but said nought of the coming parting.

Tom made two or three desultory jokes, which fell flat, so he amused himself by pulling grey hairs out of the black kitten, which had jumped upon his

knees, and whistling inwardly—which was rather a fatiguing process.

The answer came from Cornwall; Aunt Katie would be delighted to have her little niece, and would give her a snug bed in the dressing-room off her own room: but she could not have it just yet, till Robert, the eldest boy, was gone back to school, which might not be for three weeks or more, as there had been illness in the master's house.

Doctor Holdsworth was glad, for his own sake, of the reprieve, but he decided on telling Lily of the pleasure in store for her, in the hopes she might grow brighter in its anticipation.

It was indeed news for Lily. Her face flushed with innocent delight. Her Aunt Katie, her paragon of aunts—the gentle, kind-hearted Aunt Katie—to live in Aunt Katie's house—to walk and talk with sympathizing Aunt Katie,—it was joy indeed to look forward to such a visit

Tom heard the news over the garden palings within five minutes of its being spoken, and cried out "Bravo," and waved his spade over his head, although, poor fellow, it was as great a blow to him as to his father. When Lily had rushed into the house to tell all the servants, he dug down his spade with an unnecessary vehemence, muttering it was all of a piece with the dog and the Manx cat; he was

getting so awfully fond of Lily, and of course she was going away: he believed some fine morning when he got up he would find his garden had walked away in the night: he wished indeed that little Maurice had turned out all right, it would have been so awfully jolly to have had him now for a companion.

Lily began decidedly to improve. She had something bright to think of—something with which she could smother remorse—something which put asleep for a time the wakeful, restless conscience, which before had sat at her elbow by day and night. She would leave Maurice and the workhouse behind her; by the time she came back all would have been forgotten, and Maurice perhaps grown accustomed to his new life; if not, when she returned she would make a desperate effort to get him taken out again, an effort for which she had not the courage now; the fear that all could and would in the end be made clear for Maurice, began to die within her, as the day for departing drew near.

Tom tried hard to share in Lily's glowing anticipations, and talked even sometimes of the huge rocks and the roaring waves she would see and hear, as if his own heart were bound up in her expedition also. Sometimes, however, he fell into a miserable restlessness; but it was not altogether

about Lily—there was something else which had begun lately to undermine his peace.

He had for some days past seen a little white face, always always peering through one window of the workhouse, a window high up and which overlooked the avenue where Tom walked up and down on his way to town. Once he had seen a little arm waved backwards and forwards to attract his attention, and when he had stopped and waved his in return, the figure had leaned forward, and he had seen that the boy wore no grey suit but a white wrapper, which proved that at least for a time he was committed to the sick wards of pauperdom.

This fear took possession of poor Tom's mind; though he dared not question his father lest it might be confirmed : he did not even share his fears with Lily, lest it might spoil her anticipated pleasure ; so he patrolled the few yards of ground opposite the infirmary window incessantly, waving his hand, taking off his cap and throwing it up into the air, going round like a catherine wheel on his legs and arms—though this latter feat sent him more than once to bed with a headache.

At length the letter arrived from Cornwall, fixing the following Tuesday for Lily's departure. Tom carried it into the schoolroom himself, and laid it down before her.

"Awful sorry you're going," he said, "but you'll write to a fellow sometimes, won't you?"

"Of course I will, Tom."

"And don't go and get stuck up and come back thinking yourself the cleverest girl in all creation, as you did from the Claphams visit, last year. I like you awfully the way you are now, neither a prig nor a prag; and don't go screwing up your hair into frizzles and fiz-gigs as you did then: I never thought you half as nice as you are now, and of course that accounts for your being sent off. Read the letter—there: don't get cocksy, old girl, from all the praise I've given you;" and Tom left the room to take another turn up and down the avenue.

There was no danger just at this moment of Lily's growing cocksy over Tom's praise.

Every kind word, every kind look from Tom, were like pins and needles at her heart quickening into life again the remorse she had been so assiduously lulling, and making more impossible the thoughts of confession.

She read the letter through with a dull sort of pleasure, quite different to the excited joy she would have experienced another time, and set about packing her desk and workbox heavily enough.

When she had finished gathering up her odds and

ends which lay about the schoolroom, she put on her old hat and went out to get a breath of fresh air ; for she felt as if she had a fog in her head and in her chest, and as if the grey clouds outside were casting a shadow inward on her heart.

She ran up the "Lady's walk," down the side of the meadow, round the long shrubbery, till she came out at the foot of the avenue ; here she stopped suddenly and looked bewilderedly around her.

For there was old Tom on the brow of the lawn above, going on like a maniac ;—standing on his head ; carrying his walking-stick on his chin ; leaping up into the air ; waving his cap round and round ; tying his pocket-handkerchief up into a rabbit, and making it spring from arm to arm ; finally, taking off his coat, buttoning it on the wrong way, and walking backwards down the lawn, so that he did not perceive Lily till he stumbled against her, and fell with a lurch upon the ground.

"Tom, are you mad?"

"Lily, whatever brought you here?" and Tom, being at a loss to account for his strange conduct and appearance, was constrained to take Lily by the arm and lead her to the top of the lawn, and point her out silently the little face pressed closely to the many-paned workhouse window.

"Is that Maurice?" asked Lily, in a low, wavering voice.

"Of course it is," replied Tom quickly.

"Why is he dressed in white—he is not ill—is—he?" the words seemed to drop heavily from her mouth like stones.

"He must be—he could not remain in one spot all day long unless he were in bed, and people don't stay in bed for fun or laziness up there."

Lily stood for a minute or two looking up at the window, through tears she could not conceal; but when they fell upon her lustre pinafore, she turned quickly away and walked towards the house.





CHAPTER XII.

LILY'S CONFESSION.

TOM having waved a farewell to Maurice, sauntered up the avenue after Lily, but at the curve where the garden walk joined in, he met his father, who asked him to turn back again and walk with him to the gate.

"I have a commission for you, Tom, my boy, which I daresay you will have no objection to carry to effect."

"What is it, father?" asked Tom curiously.

"I wish you to get Maurice's grey parrot from the lodge, and carry it up to the workhouse this afternoon. The boy is ill, and I have obtained permission for it to remain there for a short time."

Tom's face flushed up at this news, scarcely knowing whether he liked the commission or not, but as his father continued, half musing :

"He's a strange boy, is little Maurice. Sometimes almost feel staggered in the judgment I formed of

him at first. His life in the workhouse, and his whole conduct from the hour I left him there, have been in exact opposition to everything I expected to hear of him ; both master and matron join in saying they have never had so obedient or truthful a boy in their house.—I am sorry for the poor child, very sorry, Tom.”

“ Why, father, what is the matter with him ? ”

“ It is hard to say, Tom, hard to say :—it seems a gradual wasting of health and strength and mental vigour. I very much fear at times that it is the result of a fall, and that some secret disease is at work, which in time may declare itself openly. He is in a stupid, heavy sort of state, now passing hours looking out of the window by his bedside without speaking, and at other times sleeping so heavily I find it almost impossible to rouse him. I think the bird might possibly amuse him ; and a chat with you, Tom, would be better for him than all the medicines in the world.”

So in the afternoon, Tom, with a swelling heart and a full eye, took the cage containing the old grey parrot in his hand and walked up the hill to the workhouse.

He had to stop a bit, first at the gate to show the bird to the porter, and afterwards in the small study off the hall that the master and matron might see

the new arrival. Then Tom, his heart beating down to his finger-ends, mounted the infirmary stairs and walked in.

There were many pining suffering children in the beds ranged so orderly down the apartment, but Tom tried not to see them, and moved on towards the end window where he knew Maurice's bed must be.

It was there—but the boy was leaning forward as usual, with his back turned towards Tom and his face pressed against the window frame.

It was a long, a very long room, white-washed, clean, and airy, but Tom walked down it looking neither to the right nor to the left, till Polly, much excited by her walk in the open air, cried out in a loud though cracked voice, " Bless my heart, where's poor Polly ? "

There was a laugh from one or two of the beds, an effort to sit up and catch a glimpse, from three or four others, and a deep sigh from the furthest off. Then the little face was withdrawn from the window, and there was a sudden change—such a flush to the cheek, such a look of unspeakable joy !

" Dear Master Tom—have you come to see me ? "

" Yes," replied Tom, " to be sure I have, why not ? " And Tom set the cage on the foot of the bed, and sat down beside Maurice with a cheery " Well,

old boy," which did not betray the sickness of heart he was experiencing at the sight of Maurice's sunken face and wasted hands.

"Well, old boy, and how are you? did you expect I was coming to see you?"

"Yes," replied Maurice, nodding his head and smiling sadly; "I knew you would come, Master Tom, I knew you would come and see me before—"

Maurice stopped and hesitated.

"Before what?"

"Before I go away, Master Tom."

"Why, where are you going to; father never said you were thinking of leaving this place."

Maurice did not answer, but tears crept up over his blue eyes, and his hand stole out to Tom's.

"If only, Master Tom, I could wait for one thing, just one thing—just to see Alick come home—just to hear him speak to me once more; do you think I shall, Master Tom?"

"Of course I do," replied Tom huskily, for he understood what Maurice meant now; "why, you'll grow as lively as a kangaroo when the fine weather comes, you know, and you're able to go about a bit."

Tom was answering at random: the fine summer weather was almost gone; the withered leaves were dropping down in the lawn opposite, and though it

was but four o'clock, the grey evening mist was creeping round the workhouse.

"Have you not heard from Alick yet?" asked Tom hesitatingly.

"No, Master Tom."

"Why not? of course you've written to him, have you not?"

Maurice shook his head, and turned away his face.

"You don't want him to know you are here, is that it, Maurice?" asked Tom huskily.

A silent pressure of his hand was the only answer.

"People are looking out and expecting to hear great news from the seat of war, so perhaps you'll have Alick home sooner than you think," cried Tom with a sudden effort at cheerfulness. Maurice turned round his face which brightened all over at these words, and he listened with eagerness to Tom's bungling account of war and politics, and his offer of bringing him a newspaper to read now and then, if he cared for it.

Then Tom rose to go away, and there was a pause. He saw that Maurice had something to say to him—some question to ask—some appeal to make for which his courage was failing him. But there were many eager little eyes bent on their corner of the room, many eager little ears drinking in all their words, and both boys hesitated.

During this pause the grey parrot blinked one of her grey eyelids in a knowing way, put her head on one side, and opening her beak, said with unusual pathos, "Poor Polly has had no breakfast; hip, hip, hip, hurrah for the Queen!"—The remark was altogether so incongruous and unexpected, all the little mouths fell a laughing, and Tom stooping down caught Maurice's whisper.

"Master Tom, do you believe me now?"

Oh! why did Maurice ask that question, sending the blood to poor Tom's cheeks and head; he could not say Yes, he would not say No, so, giving a hasty wrench to Maurice's hand, he strode down the room, and was soon walking up the curved avenue towards home.

The lamp had been brought half an hour ago into the schoolroom, and the red curtains had been drawn; the fire was burning cheerily, and Lily sat in the deep arm-chair before it;—her tatting lay on her knee, the black kitten was curled upon her shoulder, purring happily into her ear, and everything was so still, you would have thought she must be sleeping. But Lily was not sleeping, her eyes were wide open looking straight before her into the fire, and her mind was wider awake within, wrestling fiercely in the mortal combat of right and wrong.

Suddenly, though it was only the sound of a foot-

step on the gravel—she started up; her shuttle fell on the floor; the black kitten hanging on by its claws for a moment, followed its example; and Lily stood up with beating heart, and lips half open, to meet her brother, for if she did not say it now—why, it was more than likely she would never say it at all.

Tom hung his hat up in the hall, and came down the passage slowly; Lily's heart throbbed louder and louder as the step drew near; the door opened at length, and Tom walked in.

Then Lily's courage gave way at once, he looked so grave, so sad, almost as if he had been crying, and sat down in the arm-chair she had vacated, without a word.

Lily stood leaning with one hand on the table watching him uneasily, then murmured in a trembling, half querulous voice, "What's the matter now, dear Tom?"

Tom looked up at her, still with the same grave look. "Come over here, Lily, girl," he said kindly; and stretching out both his arms he drew his sister down on his knee.

"Lily, if it was not so horridly boyish I could cry like a fool."

"What for, Tom?" and Lily fidgeted with Tom's steel watch chain and sighed heavily herself.

"Why, I have been up to the workhouse and seen that poor little fellow, and I tell you what—it would make any man blub if he wasn't fossilized. I am as sure he's dying as I am that I'm sitting in this chair."

"Dying," cried Lily with a start.

"Yes, dying," replied Tom almost bitterly. "If you were to see his face, Lily, if you were to see his hands, and to think that if it hadn't been for my garden and for all the fuss I made about my prizes, he might be here still, and well and happy—"

"Nonsense, Tom, you must not speak that way."

"And he says still, he did not do it; and asked me did I believe him; and what could I say? I wish now I had not gone to see him at all—what could I say, Lily?" and Tom looked up at his sister for sympathy, and drew down her flaxen curled head on his shoulder.

Her mouth was actually at his ear; she could whisper her confession now into it if she had but the courage.

"Tom, dear Tom," and she put one arm round his neck.

Tom thought it was meant for comfort, and returned the embrace.

"What's a fellow to do when you're gone and he's left all alone like a crow on a stone—tell me?"

"Tom, listen to me."

"Well—yes—there, don't strangle me."

"Listen to me, Tom."

"Go ahead, I'm listening, I tell you."

"But I can't."

"You can't what? you are not going crazy, are you?"

"No; but listen to me, Tom—dear Tom, it was I broke your currant-bush."

Tom leaped out of the deep arm-chair almost into the fire, and Lily fell from his shoulder as the black kitten had done from her's but a minute ago.

"Lily, you didn't, I can't believe you."

She glanced up for one moment at his face, on which the lamplight was shining. It looked quite terrible—red, fierce, and dark. She was afraid to repeat her words, so she buried her face in the deep-piled rug, and waited for what would come next.

"If you did, I think you're the meanest, most despicable person I ever came across. If you broke the currant-bush and let Maurice suffer for it all this time, you're worse than anything I ever heard of in all my life. Did you do it? answer me this minute."

Lily kept her face buried in the rug, while Tom's withering words continued to fly over her head.

"It's nearly as bad as a murder—it is murder,

because you've killed him by it. You've let him die by inches up there, while you have been eating and drinking and getting yourself petted up to the skies down here." Here Tom halted, amazed himself at the picture he had drawn of his sister's guilt.

"Lily," he said, stooping down and chucking her loose merino sleeve, "get up and say you did not do it."

"But I did do it," sobbed Lily piteously into the rug. "You ought—ought—oughtn't to—to scold me, Tom, when I told the truth."

"I like that," cried Tom, with reviving anger. "I like that. If you had told the truth at first, it would have been a very different thing; but you have kept it bottled up all the time, till you could not help telling it, you sneak!"

"I could help," cried Lily, sitting up with her face very red at this final insult. "I need not have told it at all if I did not choose. I'm sorry now ever said a word about it."

"You'll be sorrier by-and-by that you ever hid it, if I'm not mistaken—that's if you have a heart the size of a pea in your body. Just to think, you let that boy be sent off there; that you humbugged father and me; that you let me buy that hat for you with the money I would have given to him—bah!—I despise you; I'm glad you're going out."

the house, and I wish Aunt Katie joy of her visitor."

"Other people said he was bad, as well as I. Dr. Sharpe said it, the trunkmaker said it too; so he deserved to go whether or not: besides, I never said anything."

Tom was moving towards the door, but he turned round at this speech.

"Shut up, I tell you, and do not set yourself up for a judge. If he deserved to be sent to the workhouse, I'd like to know where you deserve to be sent?" and Tom, going out, closed the door with a bang that reverberated through the silent house.

Lily sat on the rug with flushed cheek and beating heart, listening to his retreating footstep. Then when he was well out of hearing, rose, took a candle from the table, and went to her own room. Here she sat down on her trunk, packed already for her journey, and looked around the room almost wildly.

The first thing that caught her eye was the hat with the paradise plume, hanging on a peg in the open wardrobe. She sprang up with trembling fingers and snatched it off, though the elastic snapped and flew backwards in her face; she opened the door and threw it out into the passage with a "There, you may have your hat back, and welcome;" then sat

down again on her box with lowering brows and angry quick breath.


"I won't go down stairs to-night. I'll go to bed, that's just what I'll do." She stood up from the trunk, and unbuttoning her lustre pinafore threw it on the ground. "Horrid little boy, I wish he had never come about the place, I do. He has made Tom hate me, that's just what he has done." Then off went her jacket to the far end of the room, its metal buttons ringing against the drawers. "I'll go to bed and stay there, I don't care what any one says." And so she did—she got into bed in a trice and laid her hot face on the pillow; but the tears which gushed out to cool it were tinged with true repentance, and though the tongue spoke fierce, hasty words, there was a still small voice within striving to make itself heard.





CHAPTER XIII.

TOM'S MESSAGE.

 SELDOM had our old Tom, allowing him at all times to be of an excitable temperament, yes, seldom had our poor old Tom felt such a tumult of anger, astonishment, sorrow, humiliation, and joy, as during the hour which followed upon Lily's unexpected confession. Without taking time to lift his hat or coat from their peg in the hall, he strode down the stone steps of the vestibule out into the dark night and into the darker depths of the tree-shaded avenue.

Maurice was innocent—that was the one redeeming point that rose to the surface of his mind ; but Lily—his sister Lily—she was guilty ; and Tom felt as if happy household love and brotherly affection were, from this time forth and for ever, to be as a thing of the past.

He was so open, so truthful, so scrupulous of heart himself, the first impulse of his mind was abhorrence,

contempt, almost hatred of one who had acted so deceitful and ungenerous a part. What would his father say, too, when he heard it all? and how was he to hear it—who would take courage to break the truth? not he—Tom had no love for carrying tales from one to another which brought sorrow and anger and punishment in their train. Lily must confess herself; she must in justice to Maurice assert boldly his innocence, whether she accused herself thereby or not; but even Tom quailed inwardly as he thought of his father's shaken confidence and stern rebuke.

He walked hastily along till he came out from under the trees into the open curve of the avenue. There stood the grey house on the hill opposite, looming through the darkness.

Tom stopped short in his aimless walk and looked up at the infirmary window, where the gas lights were now being lit—stopped and raised his hand to his hatless head—turned his face for a moment towards home hesitatingly; but then resumed his walk down the avenue and through the stone portals of Nannie's gate out into the high road, for Maurice must know to-night, yes, to-night before he slept, that Tom believed him innocent.

He took no time to consider what he would say or how he would say it—what the people would think of his strange costume—whether Lily would

call this hurried explanation ungenerous. It was only as he strode with shortened breath up the workhouse hill that one by one these unpleasant thoughts forced themselves upon him ; but what did it signify—the night was dark ; unless they brought the lantern to the gate no one would notice his dress, or rather undress ; and as to exposing Lily's guilt, he need not mention her name at all, only let Maurice know that all was right, that all was made clear for him now.

He felt in the darkness among the ivy-leaves for the workhouse bell, and drawing it out sent a clang reverberating through the building. It was scarcely necessary, however, to have rung it with such violence, for the porter was already coming down the long side walk from the infirmary with the lighted lantern in his hand.

Tom stood a little to one side at first, but presently resumed his position in the centre of the gateway : "What do I care what old Joseph thinks of me,—it's better than looking like a sneak ;" and Tom watched the bright splash of light on the ground growing nearer and nearer. But there were two sets of feet walking behind it : that was rather unpleasant—Tom had no fancy to communicate his message to a stranger ; but he was in for it now, and must go through. On, on they came, the two

bow legs and the two straight ones, till within a couple of yards of the gate, when Joseph cried in his hoarse interrogatory tones, "Who's a-ringing at the bell—out yon?"

"I am," replied Tom, as boldly as he might.

"And who's I, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"I'm Tom Holdsworth, Tom Holdsworth from the house opposite. I just came to give you a message, Joseph, if you will be kind enough to take it."

"Ay will I, surely, Master Holdsworth;" and Joseph, in some surprise at this late visit, held up his lantern, and threw the light full on Tom's tossed hair, excited eyes, and damp-stained face—his companion withdrew a step into the darkness, and Tom continued anxiously:

"You need not mind opening the gate, Joseph; I've only one word to say to you, which won't take a moment—listen here;" and Tom sunk his voice to a half whisper.

"You know that little chap in there, don't you?"

"Which chap, Master Tom? there be so many hundred chaps in yon."

"Oh, bother, Joseph, you must know that awful nice little fellow I brought the parrot to this afternoon,—the boy with the big eyes and the pale face—Maurice Browne—the boy who is sick."

"Ay, ay, I know—in course I know,—the

the chap the doctor brought here in the carriage the day"—and the porter turned a little aside, as if to allow his companion to draw nearer the gate.

"Well, listen here, Joseph: will you, like a brick, go up to the infirmary-nurse, and ask her to walk over and say a word to Maurice's bed, and not to let any one hear what she says, only just to whisper into his ear that I came here to tell him it was—was—was—*who's that?*"—Here Tom's voice died away together, or became inarticulate; he withdrew his hand from the iron bars, and leaped backwards into the darkness, for the light of the lantern had shone for an instant on Joseph's companion standing by the gate, and in that instant Tom recognized his father!

He could never account for what came next; whether it was shame, or fear, or surprise, or regard for the feelings of another; but certain it was, and as ignominious as it may be to relate it—Tom having loosened his grasp on the workhouse gate, turned suddenly on his heel and ran foolishly down the road.

Once within the portals of old Nannie's gate, he began to think how strange, how almost wild his conduct must appear to his father, and he deliberated whether to turn back and meet him on the road—but this would necessitate an explanation,

and Tom would be called upon to criminate his sister, a task from which his nature shrank as from the generous and mean.

As he walked on towards the house, therefore, he twisted backwards and forwards in his mind, not tired out by anger and disappointment, what course he ought to pursue.

One thing was clear, it would be impossible for him to meet his father again until Lily had made her confession; and when or how the confession was to be made, was more than he could divine.

Perhaps the angry words he had spoken might frighten her from further divulging of her guilt. A pity for Lily and the consequences of her deceitful act was beginning to creep into Tom's good-natured heart—a wish to stand by her, to befriend her from the just anger of her father; and summoning up all his courage, he determined to meet his sister again in the study, and by encouragement and kindness strengthen her for the coming trial. But the study was empty, and had been empty for some time past, for the fire had almost died out, and the black cat was soundly asleep in the very centre of the deep arm-chair. Tom placed her with small ceremony, and sat down: his pride and anger were scarcely cooled down sufficiently for him to go and seek out Lily, as

always expected to be sought out whenever Tom had wounded her feelings.

"Where is Miss Lily, do you know, Sarah?" he asked, rather gruffly of the maid, who was carrying in fresh coal to the fire.

"Gone to bed, sir," replied the woman shortly.

"Gone to bed! what's that for?"

"Don't know, sir, except that she's been uncommon restless all day, and said she did not sleep a wink last night."

"And she is not coming down to dinner, Sarah?"

"No, sir."

Tom stamped his heel on the rug, and muttered to himself angrily; for now he must face his father alone, and perhaps be driven to tell all, whether he would or not. He sat on, brooding over the newly slacked fire, trying to steel himself for the unpleasant scene which, he feared, lay before him; trying to think how, keeping ever truth paramount, he might shield his sister and yet fully establish Maurice's innocence.

But Tom need not have trembled at the sound of the dinner-bell, nor dreaded the meeting with his father. People do not live an honest, upright, ingenuous life in vain, and Tom's father, though startled by his son's strange appearance at the gate, and his stranger flight from his presence, could not allow

two acts like these, unaccountable as they might appear, to destroy the confidence in his son's integrity which had never before been shaken by thought, word, or deed. He would wait, therefore, for Tom's own explanation, little doubting to hear in good time of some piece of boyish romance or folly, into which Tom, out of his great love for Maurice, had been led.

All this, however, did not prevent the dinner from being a nervous, uncomfortable meal to poor Tom; his father's very openness of manner made his own appear more hesitating and nervous, for though his father asked no questions, nor made any allusions, Tom knew he must be expecting an explanation. It seemed the most endless dinner; the butler was longer removing the plates and dishes than Tom had ever known him before, and there were grievous pauses in the usually lively conversation.

"Poor Lily, poor dear child," said the doctor at length, "she was asleep when I came down. We must send her up something at tea-time, for these constant headaches must be most wearing—did you see her, Tom, this evening?"

"No," replied Tom shortly; "at least not since she went to bed."

"Had anything occurred to vex or annoy her in

any way, do you know, Tom? she seems to have been crying a great deal." The doctor did not know he was treading now on the dangerous ground. Tom was silent for a moment, then answered in the same quick voice, while he rose to stir the fire :

"I daresay there was ; it does not take much to make Lily cry; though," he added, as if conscious of some want of openness, "there may be plenty this time."

His father looked annoyed at this reply : he sometimes thought Tom's manner was rough with his sister—that he did not make enough allowance for her delicate constitution and sensitive temperament, and he said with a tone of ill-concealed annoyance :

"Tom, your manner, both to and in speaking of your sister, often grieves me more than I can say. You should give yourself the habit of being more considerate for her faults, and less rough and harsh in your voice and expressions."

Tom took this unexpected rebuke in silence, though the sudden rush of blood to his face and fire to his eye showed that some great control of his feelings had been exercised by the act.

After dinner his father took his evening doze by the drawing-room fireside ; and Tom, in the absence

of Lily, had to make and pour out tea. It was by no means his first effort in the art, but to-night his blunders were manifold. He turned the cock of the urn and let it run on till the tea-pot was almost overflowing; then coming suddenly back to his senses again, shut down the lid and turned off the cock: after a quarter of an hour's subsequent reverie he awoke to the fact that he had put in no tea: he rose, unlocked the tea-chest, and measuring some into the cup, added it to the now lukewarm water.

How long his next reverie might have lasted cannot be told, but his father awaking, asked for his tea, and Tom poured it out.

He was a good deal startled by the pale colour of the fluid, but comforted himself by thinking he must have used the green tea by accident; he added some cream and sugar, and carried it over to the small reading-table which stood beside his father's chair, watching with some anxiety for the effect it would produce.

His father looked at the fragrant cup doubtfully, stirred it round, sipped it, stirred round again, sipped it twice or thrice more, and then looked curiously up at his son.

"My dear Tom, is this tea?"

"Yes, sir, I think so."

"But, my dear boy, it has no taste, no taste whatever."

"I know I put in plenty ; perhaps it is green tea, sir, but it certainly looks rather rum."

"Well, well, it does not signify ; light the candles, and bring me the paper. Tea-making, my dear Tom, we all know, is not considered part of a collegiate education."

Tom brought over the *Times*, gave it to his father, and resumed his seat at the tea-table, able now to follow out his reverie at his ease. Perhaps he often was unkind, ungenerous, unsympathizing with Lily—perhaps he had spoken too harshly, too bitterly. Yes, certainly he ought not to have said that thing about "its being nearly as bad as murder;" and so would it not be well to go up now and talk with her more gently, more like a brother and a friend than an accusing enemy or a judge;—but it was awkward, very awkward to have to open the conversation, especially if Lily took a grieved and ill-used tone ; then he might forget all the kind things he wished to say, and perhaps add worse epithets to those he had given vent to before. A good thought struck him at length—he would take her up her tea, and open the conversation by inquiring after her headache.

Again as he raised the teapot and poured out

some of its contents, he felt abashed at the watery compound; but anything that was sweet was sure to pass muster with Lily, so Tom added a double quantity of sugar, and taking the cup from the tray left the room.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST APPEAL.

LILY meantime, having retired to her bed, remained there in the dark, truly miserable and lonely : she could scarcely hope or expect that Tom would come and seek her out and comfort her, as was his custom after any quarrel which had arisen between them, no matter who had been the aggressor. No ; she too felt as if from this time forth her happy school-room hours with Tom, and social fireside histories and confidences, were to be ended.

Notwithstanding which doleful misgivings, as her passion cooled down she listened for the sound of an opening door or ascending footstep, trying to control her sobs that she might hear if he were drawing near her room.

Once she almost made sure he was coming, there was a heavy step in the passage outside, and the rattle of her door was turned, but when Lily

opened her swollen eyelids, it was her father who was crossing the room, not Tom, and she closed them hastily again, feigning sleep, that she might not be questioned.

The dinner-bell ringing presently, put an end to any hopes of an immediate interview with Tom, and she gave way to fresh bursts of grief.

No dinner was brought to her room, no message sent to know if she would wish for any, and Lily began to fear that Tom had already confided her crime to her father. Then came the burning question, what would be the result, and what the punishment to follow ?

It was while contemplating his anger and disappointment, the strange truth forced itself upon her mind, that God had in the end made all clear for Maurice, and that Tom's confidence in this respect had neither been misplaced nor unfounded. Still stranger the manner in which it had all been brought about, when there was no one to come forth to bear witness in favour of Maurice, when she herself knew that nothing but a miracle could throw light on the past. This miracle had been wrought in her own heart, and God's power, working quietly and silently within, had brought about her confession and the fulfilment of Maurice's trust.

It was while her mind was aching with humilia-

tion at this thought, and with terror at the prospect of her father's anger, she heard the drawing-room door open, and Tom's footstep on the stairs. He came up slowly enough ; she could hear the clink of the china tea-cup in its saucer, and through the key-hole of the door could see the light of the candle which he held in his hand.

He stopped when he stood outside, as if hesitating ; Lily's heart stopped also for the moment ; then he pushed against the door to try if it were open, and finding it shut, moved on a step or two further to the passage table, that he might put down the candlestick from his hand and have it free to open the door.

But alas for the consequences of Lily's untimed passion, and most ungenerous revenge ! Tom's foot caught in something lying on the floor outside ; both hands being full, he staggered a step forward, and unable to catch at anything whereby to recover his footing, the candle flew from one hand, the cup slid from the saucer he held in the other, and Tom himself came down upon his knees in the midst of darkness, confusion, and lukewarm tea.

Lily sprang from her bed, darted across the room, and opened the door.

"Get us a match, will you ?" cried Tom angrily out of the darkness, "till I see what on earth I have got twisted here round my leg."

Lily turned back, felt her way to the mantel-piece, and presently returned with a box of vestas in her hand: she drew one hastily across the bottom of the box, but it died out at once, only giving her a glimpse of Tom's irritated countenance; then a second one more successfully, which, this time held with its lighted head downwards, revealed to her Tom, in much excitement, withdrawing his boot and leg from the crown of her paradise hat!

"That's it, is it? I see, I understand it all," he cried, bitterly; "you pitched this out in a rage, because you thought it would vex me. Very considerate of you, my dear, very grateful; you grow better and nicer every day, don't you?"

He looked up at her with such a curl on his lip, and such contempt in his eye, Lily could not have stood it much longer, but the death of the short-lived vesta came to her relief; and Tom, crushing the remains of the hat beneath his foot, left her to worse darkness and remorse than any she had previously experienced.

He tramped down the stairs, called to the housemaid to go up and remove the broken cup and candle, and then going into the study shut the door sullenly.

He was angry, really angry this time, and grievously wounded in spirit: he had worked him-

Self up to a pitch of sorrow and pity for Lily sufficient to counterbalance the awkwardness of the meeting, and what had it all ended in?—bah! a cupful of cold tea shot down his coat sleeve, wetting his shirt up to the very elbow,—“rather a damper certainly,” as Tom growled to himself as he held the dripping cuff before the fire.

At any rate here was an end to making it up with Lily, or standing by her in the struggle: she might tell it all herself unaided and alone, and bear it all without his comfort or support; he was sick of her petty quarrels and more petty revenges, and as she had sown the wind, she might reap the whirlwind.

He sat on before the fire, turning his arm round and round till it was almost roasted, and with some strange compound in his eyes, which made the red coals in the heart of the fire grow large and small by turns.

At length Tom heard his father push back his arm-chair in the adjoining room, shut down the piano, and go out by the far door up the stairs to his bedroom. But Tom had no intention of going to bed just yet: he was too angry, too wretched, too feverish to think of sleep; so he took down his books and resolved, by throwing himself into Euclid and algebra, to sober the excitement of his mind.

It was the same old, dog-eared, much scribbled-

in volume he was in the habit of using every day; but to-night, almost as if he had never written it, never seen it before, rose up the words, printed in large letters within the cover, "*Magna est veritas et prævalebit.*" Larger and larger they grew, till as he stared, the words seemed to rise up off the cover and stand upon the table-cloth, upon the back of his hand, on the wall opposite! "Great is the truth, and it will prevail; yes, and it has prevailed! it has prevailed!" cried Tom triumphantly, slapping the cover down right on the open page, while his thoughts returned to that day of doubt and confusion when he had first printed this watchword in his book; and he, too, stopped to think how strangely in the end God had cleared up the mystery which hung over his charge.

These thoughts led him back slowly and gently to a better state of feeling;—the knowledge that God, who had led Lily to confess, should be her judge, not he; to give her credit for the struggle she must have gone through before she accused herself, and brought herself to certain punishment and shame; and again to blame himself bitterly for his hasty reproaches, and the torrent of angry words he had poured upon her, when she had whispered her secret into his ear.

Tom folded his arms and laid his head upon them:

this was his habit often when much disturbed in mind—a habit which had been known more than once to end in a protracted slumber. He folded his arms, and laying his head on his still damp shirt sleeve, saw within his closed eyelids, in letters of flame, the words, "*Magna est veritas et prævalebit*," with a glimpse now and then of the pattern of the schoolroom table-cloth; till silence, rest, and the late hour of night overcame him, and he slept.

'Twas a hand laid softly on the handle of the door which made Tom start up to the consciousness that both fire and candle were out in the schoolroom, and he was alone; he started up, rubbed his eyes, wondered what had happened, what was going to happen next, till the chink of candlelight on the carpet grew wider, and Lily in her night-dress, clasping a shawl round her shoulders with one hand and a lighted candle in the other, walked in.

Her face was pale and her eyelids almost shapeless from tears. "Tom," she said plaintively, "did you never intend to come up: I have been waiting for you all this time in the cold?"

"Waiting for me, where?" asked Tom in a voice gruff from sleep and surprise.

"In the passage and in my own room. I thought at last you must have gone up to bed without my knowing."

"What did you want with me?" he asked again, yawning and stretching up his arms, and trying to appear indifferent to her grief, as the thought of the spilt tea and crushed hat crept back into his mind; "what do you want with me? I'm sure you can't expect—"

"Don't, don't say that, Tom," cried Lily, extending her hand deprecatingly, so that her shawl fell from her shoulders.

Tom did not exactly know what he was going to have said, but Lily's piteous face and repentant tears were beginning to touch his good-natured heart to the core.

"I wasn't going to say anything to hurt you, old girl, at least I don't think so: tell us what it is you want, and get back into your bed, for it's a precious cold night to stand shivering in one's night dress: here, put your shawl about you again;" and Tom crossing the room stooped down, and lifted up the crimson knitted handkerchief, and folded it over her shoulders.

His head was bent quite low over her, so that his rough hair brushed her cheek. "Tom," she said with a gulp and broken effort at a whisper, "I'm so sorry—I am indeed, indeed, dear Tom."

"Of course you are, don't I see that as well as you. It will all come right in the end, now that

you've had the pluck to speak out: see if it won't."

"I'm sorry about the hat too, Tom; and I'm so—so unhappy and miserable: and when papa knows all, he'll—he'll never love me again, or for—for—forgive me."

The last words were uttered in a paroxysm of sobs, as Lily, setting the candlestick on the table, sank upon the sofa.

Tom was now quite overcome: he knelt down beside his sister, and tried to drag her cold hands from her face.

"There, Lily girl, don't, don't—that's a good girl, don't cry that way. Of course he will love you and forgive you too. You mustn't think that;—everybody is horribly wicked some time or other; at least that's to say, he can't always be perfectly good; and you know it's better to be sorry for a little while and tell all, than to keep it all bottled up, and be more awfully sorry afterwards. There now, don't—that's a good girl. You'll have no eyes in your head to-morrow if you cry that way."

"But I never can tell papa—I know I can't; I've thought it over and over, and I know I can't."

"Oh yes, you can; just try: once you make a beginning, it will come as fast as greased lightning," replied Tom nervously.

"Tom, dear old Tom, would you tell him for me?"

Tom heaved a lengthy sigh, and was silent. He had guessed this last appeal was coming.

"I had rather not, Lily."

"Oh, I know, I know, but would you? do please, Tom, when I ask you."

"Well then I'll think upon it, I'll try if I can;" and Tom lifted the candlestick from the table, and replaced it in Lily's hand; "there, go to bed now."


She stood up from the sofa and looked into his face as she moved towards the door, but the face was very sad and heavy-looking.





CHAPTER XV.

TARDY JUSTICE.

 TOM sat long and late in the study that night, pondering how he could tell it, and when it must be told ;—he had crept up afterwards in the darkness, slowly past Lily's half-open door, and had heard her timid question :

“Is that you, Tom ?”

“Yes; go to sleep, it's all right.” He had opened his door and undressed in the darkness, had knelt down by his bedside and prayed in the darkness also, for Tom had never known yet the comfortless waking which follows a prayerless night; and in the morning he went down brave and firm to meet his father in the study.

The study-door was open, but the doctor's hat was missing from its customary place—he must have been sent for to some sudden case of illness. And Tom sat down in his father's chair to await his return.

Nine o'clock came, however, the prayer-bell rang and the doctor had not come.—Tom, in his absence, read prayers, and he did so this morning bashfully and nervously enough, to the long row of assembled servants, without even Lily's presence to support him.

When they had all left the room, he arranged a tempting breakfast on the tray and carried it up to Lily. She looked at him questioningly; he remarked again that "it was all right," or "would be all right presently," and went down-stairs: he was not going to eat his own breakfast just now—he was not hungry—he would wait for his father to come home, so he set the tea-pot in the fender, and patiently watched for his return. It came at length, the heavy step on the frozen gravel outside, and the well-known cough in the hall, then the door of the breakfast-room opened, and Tom looked up.

"Well Tom, my boy, we're rather late this morning, eh? you've not waited breakfast, I hope?"

Tom thought he had seldom seen his father look so hearty or bright; his face was glowing from exposure to the frosty air, and his eyes seemed full of some hidden pleasure which he was waiting to communicate.

"Oh! you have waited I see; well, perhaps so much the better—I've some good news for you Tom,

which Lily, I'm sure, would like to share;" and he drew from the inner pocket of his coat a handful of letters, one of which he retained in his hand.

"Lily is not coming down this morning," replied Tom, blushing deeply while he stooped to lift the tea-pot from the fender.

"Not coming down, poor dear child, is she still suffering from her head? I think I will just step up and see her while you pour out my cup of tea—not green tea, I hope, this morning, Tom!" and he moved towards the door.

"Father," cried Tom in so strange and husky a voice that the doctor turned round at once, and stopped with his hand on the door.

"Well, Tom."

"Father, please sir—never mind going up just yet." Tom was leaning with one hand on the back of a chair—the tea-pot was in the other.

"Tom, my dear boy, take care, you are spilling the tea on the rug—what is the matter?" and the doctor shut the door and came back to the table, for Tom had grown very pale, and sat down suddenly in the arm-chair beside the fire; "Tom, you are not ill, are you?"

"No sir, but you see—I promised Lily last night I'd tell you all—that's to say, I'd explain to you how it happened, and I thought—at least I didn't

think, but I hope, sir, you won't be angry when you know all."

Never had Tom uttered so confused or hesitating a sentence to his father before, and the doctor grew both puzzled and grave.

"What is the matter, Tom? try to speak a little more quietly, so that I may understand what you say—is this some new quarrel with your sister?"

"No, sir," and for a moment Tom's ingenuous face clouded gloomily; "no sir, but—but—Lily has been a brick, and confessed it all—"

"Confessed what all? I give you my word, Tom, I don't understand one syllable you're saying."

"Confessed that it was she, sir, who broke the currant-bush, and not little Maurice."

"Tom, is this true?" said his father, with a sudden fixed expression of face, as if he had been turned to stone.

"It is true, sir."

"And you knew nothing of this before?"

"No, father, not till yesterday evening when she told me, quite of herself, when I was not expecting it in the least. I am sure, father," continued Tom earnestly, "she would have told the truth before, only—"

"I don't wish to hear any 'onlys,' or any excuses, Tom, though I am sure you wish to make

them for her ;—pour out my tea, if you please, Tom."

Tom poured out his father's tea, and gave it to him, looking up furtively to see if he could venture another effort at exculpation.

"Father," he said at length, "Lily is awfully sorry—I assure you she is, sir; and after all, it could never have been found out if she had not had the courage to tell of herself; and now that she has told, I think—perhaps if you would forgive her this time—"

"Tom," replied his father, interrupting him, "I said I wished to hear no more excuses—there, you may take that letter up to your own room and read it."

Tom got up from the table heavily, took the letter from his father's hand, and walked with drooping head towards the door.

"Tom, my boy, come here." Tom turned round; his father got up from his chair to meet him—"You're a brave-hearted boy, and a truthful boy, Tom, and I'm sorry for your sake almost as much as Maurice's that all this has happened." He wrung Tom's hands as he spoke, and turned away to the mantelpiece.

Tom blushed at this unexpected praise, and going softly up the stairs past Lily's door, sat down by

the table in his room, to think it all over, and read the letter which his father had placed in his hand. Suddenly he started as he recognized the handwriting on the envelope, and forgetful of all else he drew the letter hastily from its cover. Then as he read and read on, surprise, joy, exultation, passed over him, till at length triumph culminated on his face. He sprang up, waving the open letter over his head, and shouted, "*Magna est veritas et prævalet*," and burst without a thought into Lily's room.

"Lily, Lily, old girl, read this—you must read this."

It was her sad expectant face, and sadder question, which checked this first outbreak of his joy.

"Have you told him yet, Tom?"

"Yes;" and Tom's countenance fell grievously as he drew near her bed. "Yes, I did tell him, Lily, and I'm afraid—you see, he could not help being a little surprised and disappointed; but you must just be brave, and bear it like a Trojan, for you know you have done the right thing: and even if he is angry, why, you know you would have been twice as miserable the other way; so do, like a good girl, cheer up, and listen to this letter which father received this morning;" and Tom without waiting for further leave or questions read on:—

“ ‘DEAR DR. HOLDSWORTH,—I write to do tardy justice to the character of little Maurice Browne, about whom you asked me for information some months ago. I believe I brought at that time some accusations against him, which have since proved unfounded. A few days after I had written and posted my letter to you, a trunkmaker of the name of Warner, living at Number 107 Beadle Street, brought to my house a basket containing the missing five-pound note, which my butler had entrusted to Maurice’s care, and also a number of unposted letters, which he had taken out with him on the same day. It appears, from Warner’s account of the transaction, that the little fellow had received some news in a letter which upset him so much, that he forgot his errands and commissions, and left his basket in the parlour of the shop, where the trunkmaker had invited him to rest, and where it was found some days afterwards, and returned safely into my hands. I intended to have written at once and cleared the poor boy’s character to you, but owing to a severe and sudden accession of illness in my household, the matter passed out of my mind, and was not recalled, till the other day, in looking over my papers, I stumbled on your letter, and felt touched with a sense of my own carelessness and forgetfulness. I hope you may still know something of the

poor boy, and have it in your power to re-establish his character before the world.

“‘Believe me, sir, with many regrets for my neglect and over hasty judgment,—Yours, very truly,

“‘SAMUEL SHARPE.

“‘*P.S.*—I forward to you by this post three letters for Maurice, which my butler informs me have been lying in the house for some time.’

“I say, what a brick old Sharpe is after all, and what a stupid I am ; I must have written to a wrong trunkmaker—but is not it a glorious thought, Lily, that Maurice has been proved in every point as honest as the sun!” Tom looked up for sympathy to Lily, but her head had disappeared under the bed-clothes ; every word he had uttered had cut her to the heart, and the quick heaving of the quilt betrayed her smothered sobs. Tom saw he had put his foot in it somehow, but the tumult of his joy over Maurice’s acquittal was so great he could scarcely recall his words—he was beginning some bungling words of apology, when he heard his father’s voice calling him.

“Tom, come down here.”

Tom went down, still holding the open letter in his hand.

"Tom, I have ordered the phaeton to be brought round at once ; see that there are plenty of shawls and rugs put in, for I am going to the workhouse to bring Maurice home."

Tom gave a shout, a real school-boy shout of joy, and took the last six steps of the flight at one bound ! his father uttered no word of reproof, but passed him slowly on his way to Lily's room.





CHAPTER XVI.

LILY'S SENTENCE.

LILY heard the message given to her brother on the staircase, and felt hurt in her heart that Tom should show such a tumult of joy over Maurice's acquittal, for *he* at least knew what she was suffering, what grief and punishment lay before her; and she heard that shout of triumph on the lobby, and the bound which brought him almost head-forward into the hall, with bitterness of heart.

She forgot in her still selfish repentance over her crime all poor Tom had been suffering for months—all *she* had caused him to suffer—the misgivings, the suspicions, the cruel convictions which had been fixed upon his generous heart—the pain, the daily pain which had been his, and which ought to have been hers alone. She made but small allowance at the moment; indeed, she could scarcely bear to think of what Tom's feelings must be when he carried to the

workhouse the news of Maurice's innocence—and dark, even ungenerous thoughts again gathered heavily in her mind, almost blotting out repentance, till she became but too surely aware of a footstep outside in the passage drawing slowly near her door.

A heavy footstep, and a heavier sigh, a pause at the threshold, and her father walked in. Lily had pictured what his face would look like, when he entered in at the doorway—when he opened his mouth to upbraid her—the stern, frowning brow, and quick angry words of threatened punishment; but she had scarcely pictured aright: she had thought only of her own suffering, not of his. Sudden tears filled her eyes when she saw the look of sorrow and shrinking pain with which he glanced towards her corner of the room, and once again repentance, at least towards him, struggled upwards in her heart.

Her father drew a chair to the foot of her bed, and sat down in grave silence: he looked out over the low muslin blind into the lawn beneath, across the pasture field and red beech-trees, into the quiet line of blue sky beyond.

Lily watched his closed lips with a feverish dread, wondering of what nature would be the first words which should break this horrible silence.

But presently the doctor withdrew his gaze from the outside world, and glanced around the room at

the corded boxes, the travelling cape, and rough straw hat which Lily had prepared for her journey to Cornwall ; then came another long sorrowful sigh, and the silence was broken.

"Yes, of course, *she* must be told all.—Lily, you must write and tell your aunt yourself this very day why I cannot allow you to go to Cornwall."

Lily gave a kind of sudden gasp, and sat upright in the bed, saying quickly, almost without thought, "But I must go, father—indeed I must, for you know she is expecting me ; she will have sent her carriage ten miles to meet me ; and—and—she will be so disappointed."

"It will be a disappointment to her, no doubt," replied her father gravely ; "it is a bitter disappointment to me."

"But, father, you must let me go—please, please do ; how could I write and tell Aunt Katie ?"

"It must be done, Lily ; you must explain the whole story *truthfully* to her, if, indeed, after such a long course of deceit, you remain capable of doing so."

"O father !"

"If I were to act with strict justice, Lily, how much greater still would be your punishment," continued her father with a growing sternness. "I should take you now to the workhouse, and leave

you there for months, to experience the same lonely, comfortless life which another has suffered for your crime, and I should give that other the same place in my heart and home which you have so justly forfeited."

"O father, please, please don't say that," sobbed Lily. But he went on sadly,—

"By your deceit and guilt, Lily, you have made me act with cruelty towards a boy without father or mother, and, as I have only this morning learned, most unjustly cast upon the world. By one act of selfish greediness, you destroyed all poor Tom's hopes of success, and broke his trust in Maurice's innocence and good faith. And what have you done to me, Lily? You have destroyed my confidence, shaken my love, and almost broken my heart."

"O father, please, please forgive me;" and leaning forward on the bed, she sought pleadingly to take his hand.

"No, Lily, no;" and he withdrew his arm from the quilt on which it had been resting. "Forgiveness must follow on repentance, and repentance must be proved by deeds as well as words; you must ask for forgiveness first from Him whose eyes have seen the truth from the beginning, and who in His own good time has brought it to light; and thank God from your heart, Lily, who in His mercy has led you

by confessing your crime, to take the first step towards a better life."

There was the sound of wheels sweeping round from the yard to the house door, and the doctor rose.

"Oh, don't go away. Please, father, don't go out without saying one more word."

"I could say no words, Lily, which could give you anything but pain." He took his hat from the table, where he had laid it down, and went out.

Lily again heard Tom's joyous voice in the vestibule, but this time without anger. It smote upon her heart with a dull, far-off sense of lost pleasure, lost hope, lost love. She had never seen her father look so troubled, so cast down, so dejectedly sorrowful; and when the phaeton had driven off from the door, she lay back on her pillow and began to think how it had all happened—how this dark state of things had come about—to try and trace it from its very root, and to ask herself bitterly why, at the very first, when a few words of truth honestly spoken would have cleared up all, she had remained so mutely silent—bearing, by her very silence, a testimony against another whom she knew to be innocent.

Step by step, as she reasoned over the past in the solitude of her room, her guilt rose up before her

eyes, till she shrank from its contemplation, and fell back with a dumb strong distress on the fact of her punishment and the letter which her father had desired she should write.

She got up and dressed herself slowly, putting on her every-day frock instead of her travelling dress. She knelt down beside her box and unfastened the cords; her face was quite white as she lifted out mantles, dresses, and linen, and laid them on the table beside her. When it was quite empty she still knelt on, gazing vacantly into the newspaper-lined lid. Tears came up now, slowly filling her eyes heavily to overflowing. She closed down the lid, and looked round to the chair on which her father had sat in his grave displeasure, then out over the low blind, as he had done, over the lawn, the pasture fields, and the red beech-trees, to the strip of blue sky above them.

Something came into her heart then which made her lips quiver and the tears tremble in their lids. She folded her arms on the trunk lid, her head sank forward till her cheek rested on her hands, and with a sob, a prayer similar in its shortness and humility to that of the publican, went out of her heart. It was followed by many more sobs; and after a long interval the shorter prayer which is sure to follow the confession of sin—the cry for help—and then

for a time there was a great stillness in the room.

When Lily rose from beside the trunk, though her face was smudged with dusty tear stains, and her cheeks were covered with red bars where they had rested on her fingers, there was something there now which had not been there before—a gentleness, a submissive sadness of humility, foretastes, nay, promises of that peace which, entering into the heart of the sinner, passeth understanding.

She put on her coarse straw hat and went down into the grass garden beneath. She wanted to be out of the way when the carriage came back from the workhouse, for she had no heart just now to face the little boy she had so cruelly injured. She sat down on the garden-seat, beneath the laburnum tree, out of sight of the house door; its drooping seed-tassels hung disconsolately over her head, the fields seemed a long way off, the garden palings white and staring, the crows seemed to fly heavily as if burdened by her distress, till Lily felt it would be better to be up and stirring than to sit down hopelessly under her disgrace.

She looked in at the library window where her father sat in his leisure moments, but even the books on the shelves seemed to be mutely conscious of her grief; the curtains looked dark and sombre, and

•

the fire creaked sullenly under a black and smoky crust.

She passed on to the next window—the small room leading into the dispensary—and there she stopped with a start. The whole place seemed changed. The old oak chest which blocked up the fireplace was gone, and newly-kindled wood and coal were giving out a cheery unexpected light and heat. In the corner where Tom's cabinet of curiosities had stood but yesterday was a bright painted iron bedstead, with bedding fresh and white, and in the centre of the room a table covered with a crimson cloth. Lily stared with wide-open wondering eyes at the transformation, till the door opened and the housemaid came in. She glanced for a moment at the figure in the window, and then said half to herself,—

“Well, well, I never suspected you of it, Miss Lily; to let the poor little boy be turned out of the place.”

Lily instantly turned away out of Sarah's sight; but she knew now the room was being prepared for Maurice.

She wandered about the grass garden disconsolately, not caring where she went. There were but few flowers left in the beds, and the wind was whistling through the evergreens, and bruising the

stalks of the long hollyhocks. She passed out through the evergreens into the lawn, with the fading lime-tree and the white palings of Tom's garden in the distance, when, gazing wistfully at them, some repentant thought seemed to enter her mind. She turned back hastily through the lares-tinus bushes and resumed her walk round the flower-beds. She gathered a dahlia here, a rose there—all the freshest blossoms she could find—and went into the house eagerly. She took a glass from the pantry shelf and settled them with taste and care, then, going up-stairs, set them on the table in Maurice's room. This was not all. She wheeled in the low sofa from the schoolroom and placed it near the fire. She had just laid an armful of story-books on the table beside the flowers, when she heard the sound of wheels coming swiftly up the approach, and with a quick sense of her disgrace she hurried to her own room.





CHAPTER XVII.

VERITAS PRÆVALET.

MEANTIME Tom had executed his father's commission well—perhaps a little too well—for the number of shawls, rugs, and blankets crammed into the phaeton were enough of themselves to try the mettle of the springs, to say nothing of a jar of hot water concealed artfully within the folds of the rugs.

The doctor looked a little dismayed when he came down the steps and beheld the magnitude of Tom's preparations, and still more so when he inadvertently sat down on the hot jar.

"My dear Tom, whatever have you put here ; and do not you think a few of these blankets might be dispensed with ?"

"All right, sir ; I was only afraid he might catch cold."

"No ; I am in hopes the drive through the open air may be of great service to him."

Tom began to guess, by his father's grave manner, that he had been speaking to Lily, so he silently removed the extra wraps and took his seat by his father.

As they drove down the avenue, and passed through old Nancy's gate, Tom remembered the morning, now long ago, when they had stopped there to pick up little Maurice Browne, and conveyed him to the workhouse. He remembered how he had turned his head aside that he might not see the pleading face of the child who loved and trusted in him. He remembered how long the grey mare seemed to take to reach the foot of the hill, and how she crawled up the other hill like a snail; and now, when he looked up, why they were there, and the groom was already ringing the iron bell.

Tom sprang out and helped his father to alight, which the doctor did with the same careworn expression of face, until he looked into Tom's bright happy one, and then his manner changed.

"Well, Tom, my boy, this is a happy morning for you; very different from our last drive here, eh?"

"Yes, sir, very," replied Tom.

The gates were opened and they walked in.

Meantime, in the long white-washed infirmary, poor Maurice lay, pale and tired, upon his narrow bed. The excitement of Tom's visit had passed

away, leaving weariness and disappointment behind it. For though Tom had been good, and kind, and loving as ever, had he not still withheld the one thing needful which Maurice coveted above all others—his trust and confidence. Yet it was clear to see Tom still believed him guilty.

Poor Maurice, the days surely seemed long and dark since Alick, his brother, left him alone to struggle with the world and its dangers and difficulties. Now, the clearing up of all his troubles seemed also further off than ever, and even Tom's love was henceforth changed for him.

The morning was frosty and bright outside, with a quick whistling wind, which licked up the red leaves on the lawn and whirled them against the infirmary window.

But Maurice, weary and dispirited, had no inclination to sit up and look out; he felt weaker and lower to-day than he had done yet. It was a sad life, after all, to wake up each morning to the same sight of suffering—to the same long row of children's faces, emaciated with poverty and disease—to lie there through the long hours of the afternoon awaiting the slow approach of death, which was to find him still covered with ignominy and suspicion.

• These were poor Maurice's dark thoughts, which sometimes in his weakness overpowered him, and

made him envy the little pauper boy who, but three days ago, had been carried in the early daylight to his long rest in the grave.

So Maurice turned his face towards the wall, and drawing Alick's letter from beneath his pillow, fixed his eyes on the well-known passage, "Trust in God, and do the right." Then with a sweet smile of innocent confidence he looked upward and asked for more faith, more trust; yes, for that trust which, like truth, must in the end prevail.

At this moment the grey parrot, who was pruning her feathers in the sunshine, set her head on one side and listened attentively, for some one had knocked at the outer door, and the nurse, putting down her knitting, rose up to open it.

"Good morning, nurse."

"Good morning, doctor. You're a bit earlier than usual to-day."

"Yes, yes; I'm coming to rob you of one of your patients, nurse. I daresay you'll not object to that, eh? But I'll take a look at the others while I'm here."

Maurice turned his head round on the pillow with the same sweet smile on his face. Dr. Holdsworth's visits were now the only bright points in his life, and this one was not expected. But while he looked, old Tom came in at the door too, with a face from

which happiness streamed as plainly as light from the rising sun.

Their eyes met, and Tom walked straight towards Maurice's bed. He held several letters in his hand, and he looked neither to the right nor to the left.

Maurice guessed something pleasant was coming, for Tom's joy was seldom of a selfish nature.

"Three letters from Alick, old boy, and another from some one else, which is better still," and Tom waved the letters over his head.

Maurice sat up; but he grew so deadly pale and faint, he could just see they were letters he held in his hand, and nothing more.

"Read them to me please, Master Tom."

"Oh, plenty of time for that," cried Tom, joyously. "I'll read them to you as often as ever you like, and a hundred times more, when I have you seated in an arm-chair, like a prince, before a warm fire; which is not to be sneezed at, I can tell you, such a frosty morning as this is."

Maurice did not take in the import of Tom's excited oration, which is, perhaps, little to be wondered at. He lay back on his pillow, for the infirm nurse seemed walking upon the ceiling, and Tom himself was growing into a dark unshapely mass. He knew that some one opened wide the

l latticed window by his side, and that the frosty air came waving up his cheeks.

“Maurice, my boy, you must get strong and brave. I have come to take you out of this place if you feel well enough,” said a grave, kind voice beside him.

Then the life which seemed almost gone came ebbing back to Maurice’s lips and eyes, while the same kind voice continued,—

“You must come home, and be put under my Tom’s charge again; he will take care of you, and be a friend to you, for you are a good, honest boy, Maurice; and I thank God He has made all clear for you in the end.”

Every word was reaching Maurice’s heart and senses now. The infirmiry nurse was smiling at the foot of the bed, Tom was rubbing his rubicund cheeks with the cuff of his short jacket, the window seemed a blaze of golden light, the room a palace of happiness; and Maurice, covering his face with his hands, burst into tears of joy.

Tom assisted the nurse to dress his charge, and the doctor himself carried him in his arms past the long row of beds, down the steep staircase into the matron’s study. Here Maurice’s name was struck off the list of paupers; and he who had gone in covered with shame and disgrace, went out

triumphant, for *magna est veritas et prævalēbit.*

The old grey mare seemed to know she was bound on a joyous errand; she pranced a little as she started from the workhouse-gate, and the ripples of her grey mane glistened in the sunshine. She trotted briskly down the hill and half-way up the other, and pretended once or twice to shy at objects on the road. It might have been that she was pleased at turning homewards so much sooner than usual, but be that as it may, she scarcely brooked the delay of Nancy opening the gates and showering her welcomes on Maurice, but trotted at the pace of seven miles an hour round the curve of the avenue, and snorted pleasantly as Maurice was lifted out of the phaeton and carried into the house.

Into that comfortable room off the dispensary, and leading into the doctor's own study, which had been prepared for him, here a fire had been lighted, an arm-chair placed in front of it, a table a little to one side, with a glass full of autumn flowers, and books of boyish adventures and exploits.

Tom knew at a glance who had settled the room and thought of so many comforts for Maurice; and as he placed his charge in the arm-chair before the fire a shadow fell over his happy face, that Lily

could not share with him the joy of welcoming Maurice home.

"There now, my boy, warm your toes at the fire, and read your letters," said Tom reassuringly; "and if you want anything, there's the bell by your side, for I must be off;" and Tom went out in search of poor sorrowing Lily.

Great sins must bring great punishments sooner or later. This truth Lily was experiencing, as Tom found her in her own room, before her desk, trying to compose her letter to Aunt Katie, trying to write down the story of her deceitfulness and its consequences.

Poor Tom almost sat down and cried too when he heard the state of the case, and Lily was fain once more to throw herself upon his good-nature.

"Tom, would you tell me—could you show me—how to write it?"

Tom felt as if he could cut his head off for her at this moment if she asked him, and he said he would try.

"Write the whole truth off without stopping to think; that's much the best plan, Lily."

"But Aunt Katie will think me so horrid and wicked; and she'll never like to see me again, or ask me to her house."

"Never mind what she thinks; write the truth,

and nothing but the truth. Don't try to smother it up in excuses, or make yourself out better than you are. Of course she will be at first in no end of a taking—that's to say, she couldn't help being surprised; but if she's worth her weight in straw, she'll like you all the better for speaking out."

Lily, moved and encouraged by this harangue, wrote the simple, honest truth in her letter to her aunt—a humble, quiet confession of her deceit and its punishment; and when she had folded it and sealed it, she felt as if another great burden had been rolled off her heart.

There was still one more confession to be made—a confession hardest of all, and from the onus of which Tom shrank entirely.

It was made, however, though the struggle against it lasted till evening, and higher help and encouragement than Tom's had to be sought for the occasion.


We will not pry into the manner of this confession or its words; but know that, ere Maurice slept that night, he knew who had been the guilty cause of all his sorrow, and had forgiven her.





CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SORTIE FROM THE MAMELON.

T became but too evident after a time of the most careful watching, that Maurice's illness was the résultat of a bad fall; the same fall probably, which occurred in Drewitt's the boot-maker's shop, when, after a day of hardships, learning that his brother was gone, the poor little fellow had fainted.

There was some injury to his back, which time and rest alone could cure; and the doctor told him he must be patient, and be content to lie quietly in bed perhaps for many months, but certainly for weeks.

And Maurice was content. Patience was no new task to him, he had practised it all his short life, at first with many tears, but oftener now with smiles, for the goal of rest had seemed so near; and though the grey house on the hill had been comfortless and dreary, he knew there was a habitation,

not made with hands, eternal in the heavens prepared for him.

But Maurice had a new incentive for patience now. His life was no longer clouded with disgrace and suspicion; he might *wish* to live now, and the old yearning grew stronger with every hour of his new happy life in the Holdsworth household—to see Alick, his brother Alick again—to see him come home triumphant from the wars, his red coat covered with medals.

He had Tom's love too to live for—his generous, unreserved, unfailing love—the love which had clung to him through all; and this wish took root in his heart side by side with the other, that he might one day grow strong and work worthily that he might repay him.

And thus, though strength lagged in its return, and the thin hands and limbs lay still almost powerless on the bed, the dimples crept back into his wan cheeks and the light of innocent happiness into his eyes.

Tom and Lily together made his room the very essence of comfort: they looked after his fire themselves, hung a curtain across the door into the passage, and bright pictures on the wall.

When Tom's work for his tutor was done, and Lily's daily lessons were prepared for Miss Turner,

they carried the study reading-lamp into Maurice's room, and beguiled the long winter evenings by new and ingenious devices : sometimes it was a book of exciting adventures, which Tom read aloud while Lily worked or drew ; other times they wearied themselves teaching old Poll songs and sentences, entirely too foolish for her age and grey attire ; but oftenest they read aloud Alick's letters from the seat of war, and discussed the chances of his return.

This latter occupation was no task to Tom. He read them each time with fresh pleasure and excitement. He liked to hear how the men lay down at night in the trenches and rose up again at the word of command to meet either victory or death ; how the enemy gathered on the heights in formidable array, but were driven back by a brilliant and unexpected charge. Not a complaint was made of fatigue, illness, or privation—nothing that could harrow the feeling heart of the young brother, watching and waiting at home ; all was life, fire, vigour, valiant deeds of his comrades, praise of his officers, talk of brilliant victories to come, and of a speedy return home.

The doctor often passed in and out of the room, either on his way to the dispensary or purposely to visit Tom's charge. He had always a cheery word for Maurice, or a pleasant smile for Tom ; but Lily

noticed with sorrowful regret the cloud which still shadowed his face whenever his eye rested on her, and sometimes she even feared that the love she had so grievously shaken could never be restored to its full vigour again.

And yet Lily's repentance was neither transient nor affected ; her sorrow for her crime was increasing with each day, not declining, and showing itself in a hundred different ways.

Of all bad natures a selfish one is the most difficult to overcome ; and Lily found that the battle on which she had entered was not to be gained in a moment, but by successive struggles, day by day, and hour by hour. Self is so near and so dear to one's heart, there must be a great struggle and wrenching of old habits and old inclinations before a separation can be effected between self and self, and space given to admit of another's tastes being consulted before one's own.

Lily did not become at once or perhaps ever a paragon of girls, but she did try from this time out, with God's help, to be better than she had been before. The deceitful act, which in its consequences had caused so much trouble and heartache at home, seemed to be the crisis of Lily's experiences. Up to this time petty prevarications, petty untruths, petty thefts, had been spoken and committed almost with-

out a pang ; but now, though the desire and temptation still followed her, the new nature shrank from their commission. Often and often she stumbled and fell, but the hasty flush or quick confession of her guilt showed that though the sinful heart was still there, the desire for something better was growing in strength and earnestness. And Tom, by example and precept, gave her great support and comfort : his watchword she tried to make her watchword too,—“ *Magna est veritas et prævalebit.*”

A letter had come to Lily from Cornwall, such as only a gentle heart and sympathizing nature like Aunt Katie's could have dictated ; speaking with genuine sorrow of the lost visit, with deeper grief for its cause, but full of bright words of encouragement and promise, and holding out to Lily pleasant hints of a future and perhaps happier visit.

So the winter crept on laying frost and snow on the ground outside, but bringing warmth and happiness to the hearts of our little household, gathered from time to time round the fire in Maurice's room.

There was not much to be done outside in Tom's garden, but he made plenty of work for himself indoors. His father, indeed, sometimes laughingly accused him of breaking the legs of the chairs and tables, for the fun of sticking them together again : it is certain the glue-pot was seldom off the hob in Maurice's room, and the

odour of carpentering industry at all hours pervaded the house.

He wrote long letters, too, to Alick, parts of which were dictated by Maurice ; and received long letters in return, but with each mail these answers were growing graver in their tone. They told of comrades fallen, of close friends parted, of true brave lives which had suddenly gone out. Tom read these letters with ill-concealed emotion, and laid them aside : he could enter fully into the loving thoughts of the heart which sought to pave the way for perhaps heavier tidings, and dim forebodings filled even Tom's sanguine breast. Their fulfilment came but too soon. Though the next mail brought a letter from Alick to both Tom and Maurice, the papers with their telegraphic despatches brought news one day later of a desperate sortie made from the enemy's garrison—of a body of Russians silently issuing at dead of night from the Mamelon—of the guards in the trenches surprised, but not discomfited—of the struggle, the valiant charge of the English on the Russian column—of the enemy's repulse with the bayonet, and of heavy loss on both sides.

"Heavy loss, indeed," repeated Tom's father, as he read the paper aloud at the breakfast table ; "one hundred and sixty-nine men killed, and three hundred and sixty-one wounded."

But he did not see that Tom's face had blanched under his words, nor hear his son's heart thumping with sickening speed against his side; nor did he know that the regiment which so bravely had come in contact with the enemy had been Alick's.

"No names given yet, I suppose, father?"

"No, Tom."

Tom rose up from the breakfast table and walked out into the hall, then into the open air, and across the lawn; and all that long day, till the short spring twilight had closed in, he never returned to Maurice's room.

By his father's advice he said nothing of the battle news which the paper had contained. Maurice's illness was now reaching a sort of crisis, when useless grieving and anxious watching might render a probable cure a hopeless one. Tom alone, day and night, bore the burden which his charge was forbidden to share.

At length came the morning which must bring the letters from the East. Tom again, as of old, was watching at the gate, and again to meet with disappointment. The postman placed the morning paper in his hand and moved on silently.

"No letter from the East? no foreign letter?" cried Tom after him almost angrily.

"No, sir."

"Is the mail in? You can tell me that, at least, if you can do nothing else."

"Yes, sir; I've left almost fifty foreign letters round the town and country."

Then Tom, disdaining old Nanny's sympathy, with a swelling heart turned away from the gate and walked towards the house.

When he reached it, he turned back again; he did not want to meet any one just now; he did not wish to speak to any one till this cowardly fit was over. But many things happen many times a day which we do not want or wish for, and at the curve of the avenue, standing a little aside in a sad respectful attitude, stood Drewitt the bootmaker, awaiting his approach.

"Well, Drewitt, what news?" asked Tom with a forced gaiety. "Come to see how many more old boots want soling?"

"No, Master Tom, not quite that; it's something of a different kind I have to say this morning"—he was feeling in his pocket for a paper which he drew out nervously.

"Oh, my bill—all right, I have the money at home. If you just walk up to the house I'll follow you."

"No, Master Tom, it ain't no bill; but a piece of news which I fear will fret the poor little fellow up

yonder, and I thought I would do well to show it to you first."

"Dead?" asked Tom, with sudden brevity, for Drewitt's clumsy fingers struggled feebly to unfold the foreign paper.

"No, not dead, but badly wounded, poor fellow—mortally wounded—carried to the rear on a litter senseless, having saved the life of a drummer-boy who was being trampled to death by the horses. There, read it, Master Tom; you'll find no braver story in the finest book was ever printed." And the bootmaker turned his freckled face towards the far-off town as he handed the letter to his young master.

Tom could not read it—he could not see one single line—for a reason I need perhaps hardly explain; but he sat down on the grass and listened patiently while Drewitt, taking back his letter, with a slow perception of the boy's grief, read it through.

It was from a comrade of Alick's, telling of the engagement, and of the "heavy loss." It was written by Alick's desire at the side of Alick's bed. It was sent to Drewitt with a request that the good-natured shoemaker might carry it to Tom. "And he," continued the letter, "who has been so good to Alick's brother will break the news as softly as he may." There was much more which Tom did not hear in

his great trouble—how the drummer-boy had a face like the little brother's at home—how with a gaping sabre cut on his forehead, and an arm hanging shattered at his side, Alick plunged in among the horses to save him. Yes, all this and more still, written in heroic praise by Alick's comrade, was almost unheard by Tom; for the bitterness of the message he was asked to convey to Maurice overpowered all other feelings.

And he gave the message that evening—he gave it, poor Tom, kneeling down by Maurice's bedside, with his face buried in the sick boy's quilt, with his arm encircling his charge, with blinding tears, with sobs which broke the attempted words of prayer and comfort. Yes, he told the truth, the whole truth manfully and softly, as only such a noble and tender spirit like our old Tom's could have told it.




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CHAPTER XIX.

THE MEETING AT THE GATE.

HE news fell heavily.

For many long days, days which crept into weeks, Maurice lay on his bed, passive, pale, and almost unconscious; his eyes followed Tom about the room lovingly and wistfully, but with small intelligence; he seldom spoke, speech seemed an effort, but his words when they did come, were innocent, loving phrases, broken in their sense, but perfect in their pure-minded simplicity.

These were trying days for Tom sitting by Maurice's bedside, and watching young life receding almost visibly hour by hour, the look of recognition growing fainter, the silent pressure of the hand unnoticed, the gradual falling asleep of the senses.

There is nothing more truly pathetic, more noble, than the love of a strong brave boy for a weak one; and even Lily admired silently, the more than

womanly tenderness and forethought which guided every act and word of her brother's. She sought by every means in her power to assist him, bringing him from time to time all the comforting words or messages she could glean from her father.

"Tom, father says Maurice may get well—he may really ; he says people often, when they come to the worst, begin to improve."

Tom always repaid her by his eager gratitude and faith for these messages ; but, after another long hour's watching by the bedside, hope seemed to die away.

The mail came in again. Tom had looked forward to this morning as containing his last chance. He fancied that could he convey to Maurice good tidings of his brother, he might still catch the frail thread of life, ere it had receded hopelessly from the body. But the post brought no letter to Tom or Maurice ; and even the comrade had failed to convey any intelligence to Drewitt of either Alick's recovery or death.

The next mail came in a few weeks later, empty-handed also. On the afternoon of this day poor Tom gave up all hopes of Maurice's recovery. He relinquished the chair by his bedside to his father, and went up heavily to his room. You would scarcely have known our old friend—sitting with his

head propped in his hands, and tears falling drop by drop on the floor at his feet, as large as sixpences.

But as evening came on, he felt the cowardly fit coming over him again. He grew afraid of every step on the stairs, of every stir in the sick-room beneath; his knees, his hands, his very jaws were trembling, and his teeth chattering together. He took his garden cap from the peg and went out on the passage. Lily was watching for him outside, but she had no word of comfort to give: he saw it at a glance, and passed on mutely. He went down the stairs, and through the vestibule into the chilly evening air under the dark trees, out again into the twilight, till he stood opposite the infirmary window. Here, for a time, he gave way entirely; for, through the frosty mist and the growing darkness, he almost fancied he saw the little face as of old pressed against the many-paned window, watching wearily.

He went out at Nanny's gate, and walked into the road; he turned without object, without hope, down the hill; he only felt he could not rest beneath this burden—he must carry it about, or sink at once overpowered. Now up the hill on the other side, with the tall building growing more giant-like at every step, and rearing itself sullenly above the long grey wall.

He stood at the gate—the heavy gate with its

ribs and spikes—he pressed his cheek against the cold iron, and asked himself vacantly why he had come there. Had he some vague hope to find little Maurice still among the wards, or had he come to find fresh food for pain and self-reproach? He laid his arm across the bars, and rested his face upon them, he did not know how long, thinking in bitterness of heart on the day Maurice's hands had been thrust through this very gate imploring in vain for a proof of Tom's promised love.

He did not hear a step drawing closer and closer to the spot where he stood, till some one touched him on the shoulder, and he looked round suddenly.

"Beg pardon, sir. I believe this is the Eppingdon workhouse?"

"Yes," replied Tom, with a dull surprise at the interruption, while he sought through the darkness to decipher the outline of the tall slight figure.

"Thank you, sir; might I trouble you to say how one can make oneself heard in the building yonder?"

"There is a bell there, just to your right-hand side, among the ivy."

"Much obliged to you, sir. And now, might I ask you kindly to give it a pull for me, as, to tell the truth, I have got no arm to draw it out with?"

Tom did as he was asked, and the iron tongue

vibrated loudly in the night air. The stranger leaned against the wall and sighed wearily, whilst Joseph appeared with his lantern, walking slowly towards them from the distance.

"If I had remembered the road here was such a long bit from the station, I should scarcely have come all this way on foot, sir."

"Are you going to sleep here to-night?" asked Tom, with scarcely roused interest.

"No, no sir; not to sleep here, thank God for it. But I've a few words to ask at the gate, a few words, sir, nothing more,"—and again the tall man sighed heavily.

"Perhaps I can help you." Tom's good-natured heart was being roused from its lethargy by the man's evident distress.

"No, I thank you, sir; it's a matter just concerning myself—it's about a little brother of mine, I ain't seen this long time back, and what have I come, sir, to hear this night, think you?"

"What?" asked Tom earnestly.

"To hear he's a-dyin'! Yes, sir. They told me in the inn by the station he was a-dying, so I just thought I would stop and find out the truth at this gate; for if I were to hear that—"

While the stranger hesitated, Joseph had reached the gate and waved his lantern in the air.

Tom looked up ; his eye was caught by something gleaming on the stranger's breast, by the flash of something at his side, by the crimson colour of his coat, by a face coming back out of the distance haggard and wan ; and laying his hand on the soldier's arm he called him by his name—"Alick."

"Ah, it had come too late, this long looked-for return—too late—too late," cried Tom's heart bitterly, as, almost in silence, he conducted the soldier towards the quiet house on the hill opposite, in whose windows the lights were not yet twinkling, white and silent and still among the evergreens and fading flowers, but containing just now in its solemn stillness the form for the sake of which these two brave hearts outside in the night air are beating so fiercely.

Some one within had heard their steps on the frozen gravel, for the hall door opened softly, and a little white figure glided out through the vestibule on the steps to meet them.

"Tom, is that you?"

"Yes ; what news?"

There was a pause ; Lily was conscious of a stranger's presence.


"Maurice is better. Father says he will live now."

There was a short prayer of thanks to God from the soldier's lips, but no word from Tom's—he had fallen, mute, still, and cold, on the steps at Lily's feet !



CHAPTER XX.

FORGIVEN.

UT, father," pleaded Tom the morning after Alick's arrival, as he stood by the study table with the young soldier a few steps in the back-ground—"But, father, may not Alick even go in and look at Maurice while he is asleep?"

"Well, Tom, if you wish to take the case into your own hands, and if you will be yourself answerable for the risk, be it so; but if you leave it with me, I must again say that I do not wish it: a sudden joy is often as dangerous as sudden grief, and brave soldier as Alick Browne is, in his own weak, disabled state, I should scarcely like to trust his courage at the moment of such a meeting. No, Tom, patience my boy: the tide is only creeping slowly up the sands—remember how far it went out; almost out of sight before it turned again; we must be content to wait a few days longer."

"But, father, Alick has only been given his leave for one more day, and then he must return to London."

The doctor looked at the tall, handsome lad, for Alick was but a lad still, as he leaned against the door, and asked with an almost tender solicitude, "What do you say, Browne; for after all you have the best right to decide?"

The soldier touched his forehead military fashion, though with his left arm. "I thank you, sir; I thank you from my heart, sir, for all your kindness to my brother. You're right, sir; I don't feel as if I could almost bear to see him just now; with God's blessing I'll wait till we're both more hearty, and fit to look each other in the face."

"I think you are deciding for the best, Browne; indeed I am quite sure of it: but I trust as soon as you can obtain leave you will come down and stay here for a time and see him comfortably; or if this cannot be accomplished, when Maurice grows strong he shall go up and see you; but rest content on one point, my friend—as long as Maurice lives he shall never want a home or a friend in this house."

"I thank you, sir, and I thank my God for all his goodness," replied the soldier with truthful brevity, and again touching his forehead with his hand, he stepped back into the hall.

"Tom, you are disappointed," said his father, kindly stretching out his hand to his son, as Tom stood with filling eyes gazing down upon the study table; "but open the door gently and go in; judge for yourself if I am right or wrong."

Tom turned the handle softly and walked in. The blind had been partly raised, the shutter was half folded, the window was open, and the air fresh and pure stirred the folds of the white curtains.

Tom walked over and stood by the bedside, while the tears rained down his jacket. There was something in the very peace of the sleeping face that was even more touching to witness than pain,—the peace which was almost like death—the calm which seemed as if the poor tempest-tossed spirit had cast anchor at length and for ever in the haven of rest.

Tom would not, even by a whisper, have broken such a trance of rest. So in the afternoon the two tall lads, Alick Browne and Tom Holdsworth, walked into the town of Eppingdon and visited Drewitt the boot-maker, and the grave of poor Joe the boot-maker's son. And Drewitt made Alick an offer which brought the grateful blood to the soldier's cheeks, and made Tom wring the old man's hand in an ecstasy of joy;—an offer which made Alick Drewitt's partner in the business, and his sole inheritor after his death!

"Why, with your pension you'll be as rich as Cræsus," cried Tom in his usual sanguine eagerness, "and Maurice living quite close to you. Drewitt, you're the greatest brick that ever lived;" and again he wrung the freckled hand of the shop-keeper.

The next morning Tom drove Alick to the station and saw him off, and returned to find Maurice still mending. He resumed his patient task of watching by the invalid's bed, longing, praying for the hour when he might whisper into his charge's ear the words, "Alick is come home."

It was one evening in the twilight when Tom and Maurice were alone, the explanation took place: it was unexpected unpremeditated. Tom had thought Maurice was asleep, and, to tell the truth, he was verging on dream-land himself, when he heard a low voice from the pillow breathe a question into his very ear.

"Master Tom, is brother Alick come home?"

Tom started up bolt right, and rubbed his eyes. It was too dark to see anything well, and he thought he must have been dreaming.

"Did you speak, Maurice?"

"Yes, Master Tom, dear master Tom; is brother Alick come home?"

"Come home!" repeated Tom in surprised confusion; "what makes you think—how do you know he has come home?"

"A long time ago, when I was lying here, Master Tom," continued Maurice softly, "I do not know if it was night or morning, I dreamed, or I felt as if Alick were standing near me; I heard his voice, but I could not see him; it seemed a long way off, but sometimes now I think it was no dream, Master Tom, but truth."

"Why?" asked Tom shortly.

"Because you have looked at me in such a way, I knew there was some good news coming."

It must be confessed Tom was a little disappointed to find his own face had played traitor and told the cherished secret—to find the first bloom taken off his long looked-forward-to surprise. But he told Maurice the whole story, and how it had all come about, very gently, very carefully, for he had to speak of the lost arm, and the sabre wound across the handsome face—he described the return in the troop-ship, spoke of the promised pension, and bid Maurice grow strong quickly, that he might see his brother again.

And Maurice did grow strong quickly. Each day seemed to bring fresh vigour, each hour fresh life. He was soon able to be lifted on the sofa; then, by-and-by, to lie for an hour on the garden-chair in the sun; and presently, leaning on Tom's arm, to walk round the flower-garden where the violets and prim-

roses were now covering the shady nooks beneath the trees.

One fine morning—it was in the beginning of May—Tom, having given his charge his breakfast, strolled out on his favourite walk to meet the post, or rather postman, at the gate; and for once his happiest expectations were more than realized, there was a long letter to him from Alick, and a letter to Lily from Cornwall. Tom guessed at once it was a renewal of the lost invitation, and he felt as great and sudden a thrill of joy as Lily herself could have experienced; but, as he opened and read his own, his whole face flushed with excitement and joy, and ere it was finished he had gathered it up in his hand and set off at full speed towards the house. He tossed Lily's letter in at the school-room window, and going in at the vestibule made straight for his father's study.

Lily blushed when she raised her letter from the ground where Tom had thrown it, and saw the Cornwall post-mark—blushed red and hot when she broke the seal, and deciphered its contents—when she read the kind invitation not only for herself, but including Tom, and even little Maurice; for, Aunt Katie having heard the whole truthful statement from Lily, was anxious that little Maurice, who had suffered wrongfully with such patience, should now be a sharer of their pleasure.

Lily hesitated : she stood with her hand on the door—irresolute. The grave reserve between her father and herself had scarcely yet been broken down. She brought the letter to her father's study, and waited pale and trembling for his decision.

"Lily, my child, come here," he said kindly, when he had finished reading it through.

She drew near with drooping head.

"Lily, my child, come here to me ;"—he put his arms round her gently, and drew her down on his knees.

"You must tell me yourself, Lily, what I ought to say."

Lily grew paler, but was silent. She did not wish to have to pass sentence on herself ; but her father continued,—

"Tom has only just this moment left the room. He has asked and obtained leave from me to start to-morrow morning for London with little Maurice. And how can I spare you both, Lily ?"

Lily answered his question with a profound sigh.

"But Tom I am sure, when he hears of your invitation, Lily, will offer to give up his expedition. If so, you would wish to go—would you not ?"

"Is Maurice going to meet his brother ?" asked Lily, hesitatingly.

"Yes. I was not to betray Tom's secret ; but I

think I may 'trust' you now. He has a great surprise in store for Maurice."

Lily's face lit up at the word "trust," and she said, with unaffected sincerity of earnestness,—

"Then, don't say a word to Tom about my invitation—please don't; I'd rather stay at home, and let them go."

Her father drew her still more tightly to him, and said in his kindest voice,—

"No, Lily dear; I am very glad this invitation has come. I should be sorry indeed that it should have to be given up. I think, after this long and anxious nurse-tending, we all want holiday and rest. We must get back some colour in these pale cheeks"—he laid his hand softly on Lily's face; "and Tom must pull up his lost flesh and appetite; and Maurice must grow brave and hearty; and, I think, somehow I must go with you to see how happy we can all be together. Eh, Lily, my girlie."

Lily laid her hand on his shoulder, and the tears came up into her eyes; it was so strange this returning love and softness—it seemed to reach her very heart.

"We shall therefore let Tom and Maurice take the start of us, I think, Lily. We can join them in a day or two at London, and all go on to your aunt's together. This will be a good plan, I think, and a happy one."

Lily said "Yes," but the words sounded more like a sob.

"On our return I hope we shall find Alick Browne comfortably settled at Drewitt's house ; and little Maurice I am going to apprentice to myself. He is a good boy, an honest boy, and a patient boy. With these qualities he must in the end succeed, if not excel. And now, Lily, my girl," he continued, cheerfully, "let by-gones be by-gones. Your efforts at improvement, which must always be the best proofs of repentance, have not been unnoticed. I confess I was at first inclined to doubt their worth ; but I trust now that I can see a real change at work, a change which your own strength could never have accomplished. Can I therefore refuse to forgive what God has, I believe, long ago forgiven ? No, Lily. Go on in the same strength ; and may God bless you, my darling."

He kissed her as he had not done for months, and Lily went out of the room comforted.





CHAPTER XXI.

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DOM was not going, by word, look, or deed, to betray his new secret, or let Maurice guess at the surprise that was in store for him.

He only smiled a great deal when he thought Maurice could not see him, and once or twice laughed out right and jumped through the low window into the garden beneath.

The doctor drove them himself to the station, past the grey house on the hill where the old mare from long habit wished to halt, past the white houses beyond, through long lanes and quiet villages, to where the telegraph posts and signals pointed out a more swift mode of conveyance.

When the two boys were seated in the railway carriage, Maurice could not refrain from asking a few questions relative to their journey. He knew, of course, that he was going to see Alick; but could form

no conjecture as to the sudden cause of so hasty a departure.

“Where are we to sleep to-night, Master Tom?”

“Sleep! I declare I can’t tell you that. We must make out a lodging somewhere; or if not, go to an hotel.”

“Shall I see Alick to-morrow, Master Tom?”

“To-morrow! I should rather think you would. Now don’t ask any more questions Maurice, or you’ll make me tell all, and spoil everything. You’ll see something to-morrow that you don’t expect—you may know that much, but no more.”

A very little more probing would have brought the secret to light, but Maurice lay back contented, for he was to see Alick to-morrow, and was not that enough pleasure to think of.

They found comfortable rooms in Jermyn Street, where Tom had once before lodged with his father. Maurice, tired but happy, slept profoundly through the night; while Tom, restless and excited, in the solitary possession of his great secret, tossed about wakefully till it was time to rise for breakfast.

When this meal was over he called a fly to the door, and made Maurice get into it with him. They drove to a tailor’s in Piccadilly, where Tom bought an entire new suit for his charge, with money his father had given him for the purpose.

When Maurice would have remonstrated, Tom cut him short.

“Now don’t say another word: if you knew who you were going to see to-day, you would wish to wear a gold dress, old boy.” Tom winked at the tailor when he said this, as if he were a partner in the mystery; the tailor smiled in return, with great condescension but some bewilderment.

“Now,” cried Tom, drawing a deep breath, as he looked at his watch, “we have only just time to get there, you can walk a short distance, can’t you, Maurice, the place is not far off?”

“Yes,” replied Maurice stoutly, as he looked up at Tom’s beaming face.

“This way, then.” They dismissed the driver of the fly, and turning into the Circus, made their way down the hill towards the long flight of white steps leading into St. James’s Park.

The pathway was crowded, so they could only make their way slowly. People were pressing up from behind, and hurrying on in front, whilst others walked in the street for greater speed.

There were women with pale faces, old men leaning on their sons, little children holding each others’ hands and blocking up the pathway. Every now and then, as a red coat passed them, Maurice gave a sudden start and clasped Tom’s hand tightly,

expecting at each moment to recognize the well-known face. As they reached the head of the long flight of steps and could see well across the park, Maurice became aware of an immense body of soldiers gathered in front of some tall grey buildings to the left. Towards this point the crowd in front were pressing forward, running in the more open spaces, and pushing in the denser quarters.

The air even seemed filled with the excitement; it made the blood of our two heroes run hot and strong, and it blenched their cheeks. Maurice leaned heavily on his protector, but said nothing.

"Am I going too fast?" asked Tom, slackening in his speed. "There, lean on me properly. You must not look so pale, you must not break down, old fellow, just now, at the proudest moment of your lifetime. That grey building on your left is the Horse Guards, and you will see Alick presently."

He held them back bravely, poor Maurice, the tears of love and weakness, which were making the long line of infantry look like a red brick wall, on which the sun shone flashingly. As they drew nearer they could perceive a dais erected in the centre of the parade, and barriers to keep off the ever-increasing crowd.

As they came closer in to the barriers, the faces of the multitude were upturned in one excited mass,

and a never-ceasing hum pervaded the wide area of living beings.

As the clock in the Horse Guards struck eleven, the hum rose with a sudden impetus to a mighty roar—to a mighty cry of gratitude, pride, and admiration.

“Maurice, look up! Take off your cap, man—wave it in the air—that is our Queen!” Tom had taken off his own and was frantically swinging it above his uncovered head; but when he looked down, he saw that Maurice, wedged among the crowd, weak and white as death, was only saved by the crush from falling.”

“Here, I’ll lift you up, you poor little fellow. Hold on by me. Don’t, don’t break down, Maurice; you’ll see him in a moment. There, try and stand up like a man.”

“Here, sir!” cried a hearty voice at Tom’s elbow, as he fruitlessly tried to raise his charge from the throng. “Here, let me lift the little chap; it ain’t the first time that we have met, eh! don’t you remember the old trunk-maker in Beadle Street, and how he told you you would live to see this day?”

In another moment Maurice’s head was raised high above the surging crowd; he saw the line of red coats, at a given word of command, close up four deep; and then came the peculiar, soul stirring sound

of a vast multitude under the spell of some great expectancy.

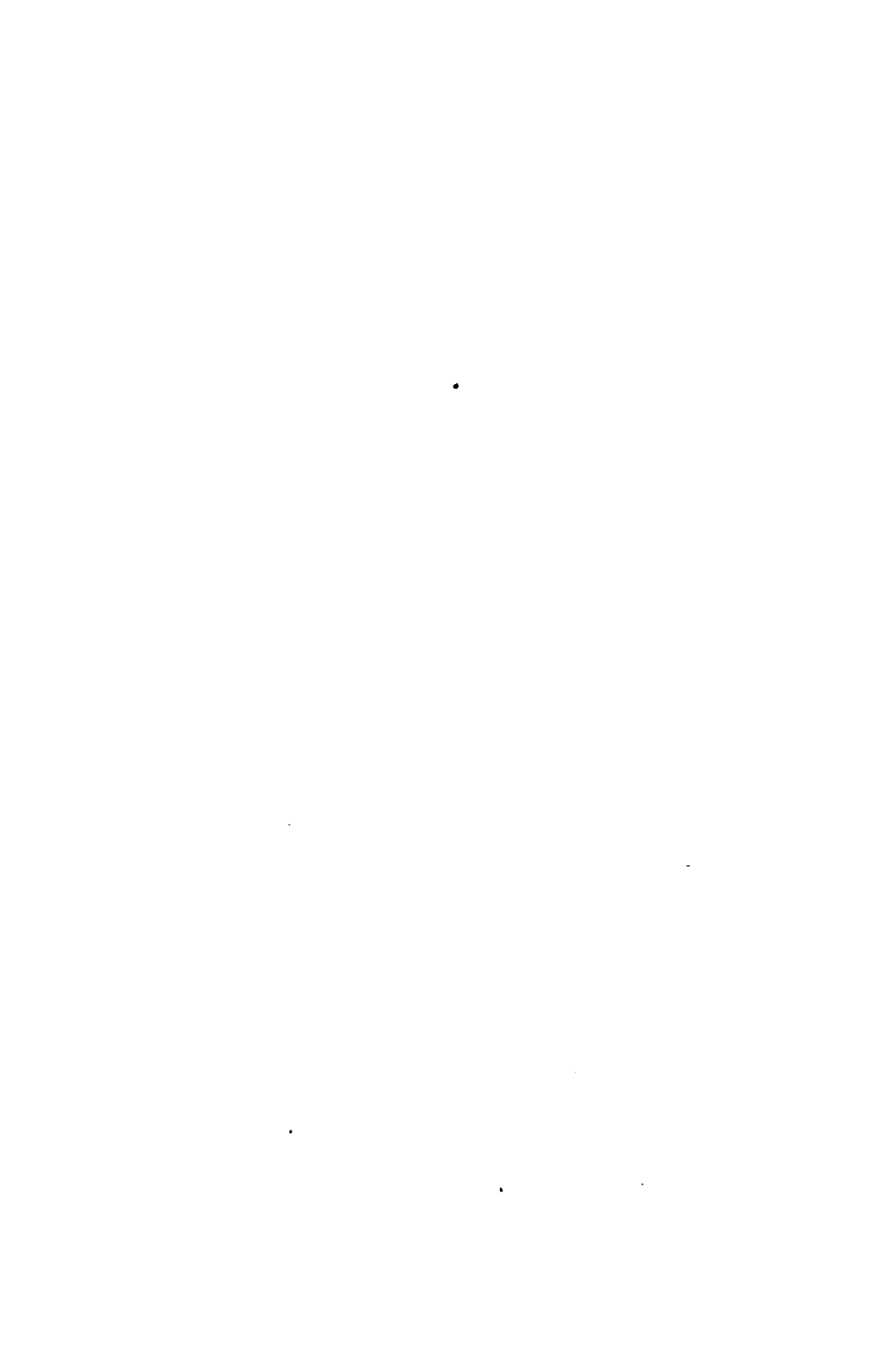
The Queen stepped forward—it sank suddenly to a lull—you might have heard a whisper in the silence that ensued, while all eyes looked down the long defile between the ranks of infantry. Then they came forward one by one, that pale band of warriors, mutilated, scarred, and haggard, one by one in single file;—with eyes cast down in proud humility they drew near their Queen. The silence still hung suspended over the crowd; but there were tears leaping in a thousand eyes.

Something shone brightly in the royal hand, (Maurice's cheek flushed up); it glittered in the sun as she extended her arm and transferred it to him who headed that noble host. Maurice understood it all now, as one by one filed past with the bright stars twinkling on their breasts, and as he looked, each moment the fire of hope burning stronger at his heart, a soldier taller by many inches than the rest came up the line, erect, noble, manly, on his brow flamed a red scar, while the soldier's epauletted sleeve was pinned empty to his breast. As he knelt to receive his Sovereign's gift the hush of the crowd was broken—broken by a child's voice, piercing and clear—broken by words of love and pride,—“Alick! it is Alick, my brother!”

The young man looked up suddenly at the white face raised high above the crowd—even the Queen looked round, on whose cheeks stood already tears of womanly pity and gratitude. There was no longer silence, the people took up the cry, there were bursts of applause, unrestrained sobs of pity, groans of sympathy, as each fresh warrior knelt to receive his prize.

And here, in the presence of the true and great, with the sunshine beaming on Tom's exultant face and on Maurice's triumph,—I close the history of our two brave boys, companions in arms, patient in suffering, soldiers of the Cross. For one day, too, when *their* warfare is accomplished, *their* victory won, shall they not kneel before the sovereign Lord of all, in the presence of ten thousand thousand angels, to receive a still more enduring reward—a crown?—yes, for *magna est veritas et prævalebit*.





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